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The New

REPUBLIC



What's Really Eating David Axelrod?

The Disillusionment of Obama's Political Guru

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IN PRAISE OF BLAME
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THE RESEGREGATION OF OUR SCHOOLS
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The Price of Tea

THERE'S A STRAIN OF SCHADENFREUDE that often masquerades as political strategy. It leads rational, thinking men and women to cheer on opposing parties that nominate seemingly unelectable radicals and lunatics for high office. Bully, they shout, the differences between the two parties have never been starker! How could voters stand on the side of idiocy? Sometimes, this notion holds, and the crazies go down in a spectacular implosion with the ideological shrapnel even wounding the more moderate members of their party. And, of course, sometimes it fails—and then you have Speaker Newt Gingrich.

You can forgive Democrats for clucking over the triumph of Christine O'Donnell. This has been a political season devoid of any real good news for them, and, in fact, it has the look of one of the most epic electoral disasters in American history. So, when Delaware Republicans cast aside a venerable nine-term congressman with broad appeal in favor of a onetime practitioner of witchcraft who has railed against the horrors of masturbation, Democrats could barely contain themselves. Nancy Pelosi called the triumph of O'Donnell and other ideologues a "very positive" development. Donna Brazile proclaimed, "The Tea Party has made Democrats the lesser of two evils, swinging the door wide open for them to preserve their majority."

Yet, for all the short-term benefits that flow from O'Donnell's victory—namely, the increasing likelihood that the Democrats will hang on to an imperiled Senate seat and, therefore, the Senate—she's part of a trend that merits no such happy talk. Elections are not just occasions when seats are held or lost. They are moments when ideas gain currency, when the ideological mainstream is remade. Candidacies like the Tea Parties' have historically had the effect of transporting issues from the province of cranks into acceptable political discourse. We saw this time and again during the conservative movement's takeover of the Republican Party—as supply-side economics and social conservatism first reared their heads in

Senate races and aborted presidential candidacies, before making their rapid migration toward the political center.

The Tea Party is filled with candidates like O'Donnell, who have a predilection for goofy crusades and extreme statements. As Bradford Plumer documented in the previous issue of *THE NEW REPUBLIC*, they have displayed an odd fetish for amending the Constitution. A number of Tea Party candidates, for instance, would like to strip away the Seventeenth Amendment—you know, the one providing for the direct election of U.S. senators. Others are merely content to knock out a few Fourteenth Amendment clauses that guarantee citizenship to anyone born here. Then there is Colorado gubernatorial hopeful Dan Maes, who believes that municipal efforts to promote bicycle use are a harbinger of world government.

Some of these candidates will prove the optimistic musings

of Democrats right. In a few instances, like Delaware, the GOP will likely be penalized for nominating extremists. But, on the whole, we are about to welcome what might be the most radical Congress in recent memory. Both the Tea Party and its Republican allies are in the process of taking traditional, limited-government conservatism and transforming it into a new beast: a constitutional vision that would radically constrain the federal government.

In the face of this challenge to liberalism, it is not enough for Democrats to play pundit—to merely take to the TV talk shows and express their hope that the public will intuit and then reject the new radicalism. Democrats need to shred it. And, unfortunately, Barack Obama seems to have no interest in mounting a full-scale assault on this ideology. When

The New York Times reported that the White House was mulling ads attacking the Tea Party, David Axelrod furiously denied any such plans. This seems a horrible misreading of the electorate. How will the public understand the implications of the Tea Party's constitutional conservatism if they are not explored—and not attacked? The president and his party can't even bring themselves to explain how a Republican majority will redouble its assault on Social Security and Medicare, let alone expose the darker reaches of Tea Party thinking. Choices are only clear when we make them so. ♦



Save Donald Trump!

Is now a really bad time to soak the rich?

JONATHAN CHAIT

ONE IDEA that has gained oddly wide currency, especially among Republicans and moderate Democrats, is that a recession is an especially bad time to raise taxes on the rich. “If the priority is to get people back to work, is to start growing this economy again, then you don’t want to make it more expensive for job creators,” asserts GOP House Whip Eric Cantor. The plight of the rich is never far from the minds of the political establishment, and the state of the economy has given fresh urgency to the cause of sparing the very prosperous from the horrors of Clinton-era taxation.

The notion that it’s especially damaging to raise taxes on the rich during a recession—call it the Donald Trump Emergency Theory—is nonsense of a special type. You have your essentially wrong economic theories, like monetarism. Then you have pseudo-economic theories, like supply-side economics. But the notion that you shouldn’t raise taxes on the rich during a recession does not even rise to the level of pseudo-economics. It’s a talking point dressed up as economics.

What gives this dressed-up talking point a veneer of plausibility is that it weaves together two different strands of economic thought. Economists believe, to varying degrees, that marginal tax rates on the rich matter. If you set those rates too high, the rich will have less incentive to create wealth and will arrange their financial affairs to avoid taxes rather than to follow the signals of the market.

Almost everybody agrees that this dynamic exists to some extent, with some disagreement centering on how significant the dynamic is. (The mainstream, persuasive view is that the Clinton-era tax levels President Obama proposes to restore would have minimal impact on incentives.) Now, you can find some conservative economists who believe that even Clinton-era marginal tax rates would have a significant impact. And then, further on the fringe and mostly outside the economics profession, you have supply-siders, who believe that marginal tax rates on the rich single-handedly determine the fate of the economy.

TRB *From Washington*

The thing to keep in mind about this aspect of economic theory is that it has nothing to do with whether the economy is in a recession. Whatever the relative merits of reducing upper-income tax rates, they apply equally during any economic conditions. This policy concerns increasing the long-term productivity of the economy, not putting people to work during a recession.

There is an economic theory that holds that the timing of tax or spending policies matters a lot. That theory goes under the rubric of Keynesian economics and holds that the government should counteract recessions through deficit spending. The broad contours of Keynesian theory are widely accepted.

The thing to keep in mind about Keynesian theory is that it’s all about increasing consumer demand. It has nothing to do with the incentive structure of rich people or business owners. The purpose of deficit spending is to get people to spend more money. And the economic consensus holds that tax cuts for the rich are a terrible way to get people to spend more money. Everybody wants to save money during a recession (that’s why the government has to inject spending). Still, if you reduce taxes for people of modest means, they’re likely to spend the extra money rather than save it, because they’re struggling to maintain their basic needs. That’s not the case with rich people, who are far less likely than middle-class or poor people to spend an additional dollar in tax cuts.

The typical formula holds that upper-income tax cuts provide roughly \$0.25 worth of economic stimulus for every dollar of deficit spending (as opposed to, say, extending unemployment benefits, which provide about \$1.60 in economic stimulus for every dollar spent). To be sure, some conservative economists reject those formulas, arguing that people respond to government deficit spending by reducing their own spending. If you believe that, though, you also reject the argument for marginal-tax-rate

cuts as a recession cure.

Conversely, it’s possible to be such a strong believer in the need for Keynesian stimulus that you’re willing to support even a wildly ineffective measure like temporary tax cuts for the rich. Trouble is, advocates of extending upper-level tax cuts also happen to be the staunchest opponents of Keynesian stimulus. The selfsame Eric Cantor, quoted above pleading for the Donald Trump Emergency Theory, had this to say earlier in the year on the subject of fiscal stimulus:

We will continue to reject the Keynesian notion that somehow you can actually create sustainable jobs by government spending. Let’s face it. There is no such thing as a free lunch. Every dollar spent must come out of the private sector.

That is a coherent worldview, albeit a radical one. It holds that any dollar of deficit spending by the government causes an equal and opposite reaction by consumers, cancelling out any benefit. That worldview utterly rejects the case for deficit-financed tax cuts as a palliative for the recession.

How is it that conservatives have been able to toggle between two extreme, mutually exclusive economic theories? They have undertaken a clever framing exercise. When presented with policies designed as economic stimulus, they have talked as though the entire problem is the national debt. To wit, John Boehner: “We’re broke. Our debt is now on track to exceed the size of our entire economy in the next two years. And the government has no plan in place for paying this debt back.”

And when the subject turns to policies with minimal stimulative impact but high impact upon the long-term budget, they have talked as if the entire problem is the recession. (Boehner again: “Listen, you can’t raise taxes in the middle of a weak economy without risking the double-dip in this recession.”) And thus they have arrived at a position with no theoretical support whatsoever.

The actual purpose of the Donald Trump Emergency Theory is not to inject a fantastically inefficient stimulus into the economy, but to increase the chances of making the upper-income Bush tax cuts permanent. First you extend them into 2012. Then, in 2012, if the economy is still weak, that weakness becomes the reason to extend the tax cuts once more. If the economy has recovered, you credit the tax cuts with sparking the recovery. Foolish consistency and all that. ♦



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The Mall

Up From Abramoff

Ralph Reed is back.

GOD'S NOT LOOKING for perfect people—there's only been one perfect person in the history of the human race," Ralph Reed tells the crowd at the Mayflower Renaissance Hotel in Washington. It's the weekend of September 11, and Reed is holding the inaugural conference for his new Faith and Freedom Coalition (FFC), which is aiming to mobilize evangelicals the way the Christian Coalition did in the 1990s. "God's looking for broken people," he says, "humble and contrite people."

"Broken" was once the perfect word to describe Reed's career. In 2006, his campaign for Georgia's lieutenant governorship imploded after investigators revealed his work with con man Jack Abramoff. Reed, the choirboy-faced moralist, had been secretly lobbying on behalf of an Indian casino, and the press was quick to write his political obituary. But after Barack Obama swept into the White House on the strength of a high-tech political organizing juggernaut, friends implored Reed—the former executive director of the Christian Coalition and one of the key architects of the GOP congressional takeover in 1994—to get back in the game. As Reed tells his audience at the Mayflower, a phone call from Sean Hannity persuaded him. "I wanted to know that this was not me," Reed says, "that this was not any ambition of mine. I wanted to know that this was the Lord." Reed breaks into a sly grin as he recounts Hannity's response: "Ralph, God is speaking through this phone line right now, and he's using me to deliver the message."

It's not just Hannity welcoming him

back to the fold. Although there are only a couple hundred attendees at the event—a fraction of what the Christian Coalition pulled at its peak—many of the brightest stars in the Republican firmament show up to support Reed and regale the crowd. Karl Rove delivers a wonky dissection of Obamacare. Gary Bauer fires a broadside against the planned mosque near Ground

hope they don't, because what they did was wrong and it violated conservative principles." All, it seems, is now forgiven.

REED HAS HAD plenty of practice in recovering from controversy—a pattern that goes back to his college days, when he was fired from the school paper after plagiarizing for a column titled "GANDHI: NINNY OF THE 20TH CENTURY." That minor setback didn't deter him from going on to a successful stint as an organizer for the College Republicans. Likewise, after he left the Christian Coalition in 1997, Reed's initial foray into political consulting was disastrous: One of his early clients, Mitch Skandalakis, lost so badly in his race for lieutenant governor of Georgia that he was accused of dragging down the rest of the Republican ticket. But Reed battled back to become chairman of the Georgia Republican Party and engineered a GOP takeover of the state in 2002. "Ralph's done this two or three times now," says Joel Vaughan, a former colleague of Reed's at the Christian Coalition. "He doesn't mind getting out of the limelight for a while to prepare for his next advance." Or, as Reed once told journalist Nina Easton: "Politics isn't about winning, it's about surviving. People who don't understand that get burned out."

Still, the Abramoff scandal should have been impossible to survive. In 1998, having started a new consulting firm, Century Strategies, Reed wrote an e-mail to lobbyist Jack Abramoff, a friend from his College Republican days: "I need to start humping in corporate accounts! I'm counting on you to help me with some contacts." Abramoff soon hired Reed on behalf of the Mississippi Band of Choctaws, a casino-operating tribe trying to



"God's looking for broken people," says Ralph Reed.

Zero. Even conservative journalist Tucker Carlson shows up to warn the crowd that the liberal media is indeed conspiring against them. Carlson's presence is a surprise given that, when the Abramoff scandal broke in 2006, he ripped into Reed on his show, saying, "Conservatives will be tempted to defend these creeps, and I

prevent competitors from opening up in Alabama. Over the next four years, Reed's firm received at least \$5.3 million to stir up grassroots opposition to the rival casinos. Reed recruited figures like Gary Bauer, Phyllis Schlafly, and Focus on the Family's James Dobson to write letters to the Interior Department urging that the new casinos be stopped. All later insisted they had no idea Reed was working for gambling interests.

When the paper trail came to light, Reed was quick to note that nothing he did was illegal. Yet the hypocrisy charges were devastating: Here was one of the titans of the Christian Right grubbing on behalf of a casino. And it turned out that Reed's firm had also been lobbying on behalf of Enron and pushing to normalize relations with China at a time when evangelicals were bristling over the country's one-child policy. By 2002, even Abramoff appeared shocked by Reed's shamelessness, telling an associate: "He is a bad version of us! No more money for him." As local reporters dug into Reed's past, Georgia Republicans demanded that he withdraw his bid for the lieutenant governorship, and Reed ended up getting trounced in the primary by a little-known state legislator.

What's striking, though, is how few conservatives outside of Georgia ever bashed Reed publicly. Some evangelical leaders, like Dobson, were clearly furious at being duped. Yet when a reporter from *World*, a Christian newsmagazine, tried to get various religious figures to comment on Reed's lobbying spree, few would. "Most of them felt like Reed was more of a victim—that he was fooled by Abramoff," says Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, who also spoke at Reed's conference. "Secondly, evangelicals are all about redemption and forgiveness. We believe in second, third, fourth, fifth chances."

Seasoned operatives like Karl Rove, meanwhile, may take a more coldly practical view of the matter. As long as Reed can be useful to the GOP, scandals can always be shunted aside. At the FFC conference, when I asked Reed whether his past was a hindrance, he pointed out that a lot of people had once thought Newt

Gingrich was finished after resigning as speaker of the House. As if to illustrate Reed's point, Newt was there, too—basking in the rumors that he might run for president in 2012.

BUT CAN REED, in his new incarnation, really help conservatives? Not even his detractors question his brilliance as a political organizer. In 1989, Pat Robertson put Reed in charge of the Christian Coalition, and, within six years, the group had 1.6 million active supporters and a \$25 million budget. One study by the University of Akron's John Green found that evangelical voters organized by the Christian Coalition had tipped a number of close races for the GOP in the 1994 midterm elections. "A lot of those voters were already pretty Republican, but Reed got them to turn out," says Green.

After Reed departed the Coalition in 1997, the group's fundraising withered. "For whatever reason, the Christian Coalition didn't carry on after he left," says Reed's longtime friend Grover Norquist. Traditional-values groups like the Family Research Council do little organizing, so there was no group to fill the void. Norquist notes that turnout among faith-based voters has been dwindling ever since 2004—when Reed oversaw the Bush campaign's successful evangelical outreach effort.

There are two possible conclusions to draw from this. One is that what Republicans and evangelicals have been missing these past few years is the organizing genius of Ralph Reed. The other is that the political landscape has changed in ways that make Reed's type of organizing obsolete, or at least less relevant than it once was. "Younger evangelicals nowadays are different from those of the Robertson-Falwell generation—they're less afraid of the way the country's going, more receptive to gay marriage," says Clyde Wilcox, a Georgetown professor and expert on the religious right. "They're still conservative, still pro-life. But the Christian Coalition's message in the 1990s was, look at how scary things will be if we lose. Whereas a lot of evangelical churches these days are growing and feeling less confrontational in their politics." Perhaps as a result, most of the energy and anger on today's right is with the Tea Parties, which tend to focus on libertarian concerns like spending and deficits.

So it's still unclear whether Reed can repeat his success from the 1990s, and the

early results—his group says, for instance, that it jacked up evangelical turnout in the 2009 Virginia gubernatorial election, won by Republican Bob McDonnell—aren't yet widespread enough to support any sweeping verdicts. But even if Reed can't reclaim his spot atop the Christian Right, that doesn't mean he's risking irrelevance. Vaughan, the former Christian Coalition staffer, notes that Reed's first interest has always been secular politics—you could even call it his main religion. The GOP, moreover, is poised to do very well in the 2010 midterms no matter what, a result for which Reed will likely be able to claim partial credit. Besides, even if his current project flops, another comeback is no doubt just around the corner.

BRADFORD PLUMER

Eeyore for Governor

A candidate's search for his happy place.

MARK DAYTON's place in Washington's collective memory can be distilled to exactly one moment, on one day: October 12, 2004. That morning, Dayton, a freshman Democratic senator from Minnesota, appeared in front of a line of TV cameras and announced that in the coming weeks the Capitol would likely be the target of a terrorist attack. He knew this, he said, because of classified information he and his Senate colleagues had received, and, as a safety precaution, he was closing his Washington office for the fall recess and sending his staff elsewhere until after the following month's election.

In the hours that followed, nearly every congressman, Bush administration spokesman, and law enforcement official within earshot of a reporter delivered a unified response, the gist of which was that Mark Dayton was crazy. The Capitol Police and Department of Homeland Security professed to know nothing of any new specific threat. "He's unnecessarily panicked people across the United States," D.C. Democratic Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton told *The Washington Post*.

The facts at the center of the affair are still classified. But fairly or otherwise, the office closure stands as the moment around which an unsparing consensus on Dayton crystallized in Washington, best captured in a 2006 *Time* article naming him one of America's five worst senators. The magazine mocked his "erratic behavior," his tendency to complain about "basic facts of the job," and



Department of Corrections

"Rheevolution" (September 23) stated that Vincent Gray described Michelle Rhee's approach as "100 miles an hour, the children can't wait." Those words are Rhee's, not Gray's. We regret the error.

his penchant for Yippie-ish legislative stunts like proposing a Department of Peace and Nonviolence. The reporters dubbed him “The Blunderer.”

Four months after he closed down his office, Dayton’s poll numbers had fallen, and he announced that he wouldn’t run for reelection. By his final days in Washington, Dayton had relapsed into alcoholism for the first time in 20 years and sought treatment for depression. Asked by a high school class what grade he would give himself, Dayton—typically honest to the point of self-annihilation—suggested an F.

When I met Dayton recently, on a sticky hot Saturday afternoon in August in the Twin Cities, I asked him if he stood by that grade. “I stand by the grade I gave the *whole* U.S. Senate—that was never reported,” he replied. “But I give myself an A for effort.” Dayton was shaking the hands of well-wishers in the lobby of a carpenters’ union hall on the east side of St. Paul, where the central committee of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (or DFL, Minnesota’s variant on the Democratic Party) had just endorsed Dayton as the party’s candidate for governor. As of this writing, the man who left the Senate after one term with a 43 percent approval rating stands a narrowly better-than-even chance of being Minnesota’s first Democratic governor in 20 years.

At times like this it’s tempting to arm-chair-psychanalyze Minnesotan voters, because in Minnesota there are a lot of times like this. Minnesotans voted for Walter Mondale when 49 other states voted for Ronald Reagan. They voted for Jesse Ventura when 49 states would have voted for almost anyone else. In 2006, adjacent congressional districts in the Minneapolis area simultaneously elected Democrat Keith Ellison, a liberal African American convert to Islam and the first Muslim in Congress, and Republican Michele Bachmann, whose opinions about Islam are—well, you can probably guess. Minnesotans have sent a former comedian to the Senate and a former Minnesota Vikings defensive tackle to the state Supreme Court. The state’s Republicans have been hanging *Time*’s “erratic” epithet around Dayton’s neck at every available occasion, but it’s hard to imagine a worse misreading of Minnesota’s political temperament. You might as well attack the governor of Texas for being too fond of Stetsons.

The greater mystery is why Dayton himself wants the job. The ex-senator has been a fixture in Minnesota Democratic politics for three decades now, and none of them have looked like much fun.

Dayton’s career has been an interesting experiment in what happens when a basically well-intentioned person, possessing admirable goals but few of the natural attributes of a politician, actually succeeds in politics. You instinctively root for him to win—until you see how much winning, for Mark Dayton, looks like losing.

DAYTON IS THE scion of one of the wealthiest families in Minnesota, the great-grandson of George Draper Dayton, the founder of a chain of department stores that evolved into the Target Corporation. Earnest and self-effacing, with close-cropped gray-white hair and tieless white button-downs, he resembles an executive at a Davos mixer or Aspen Ideas Festival panel. It’s easy to look at him and see someone who might have had a long and respectable career in philanthropy or the nonprofit world. It’s harder to see the barnstorming liberal firebrand he has spent 30 years trying to be. “He’s a very shy individual—to be effective in politics, you have to get past that,” says John Ongaro, a longtime friend of Dayton’s. “His parents kept him from associating with a lot of people. I think he was raised to be a little wary, a little suspect.”

As a teenager, Dayton set out with characteristic discipline to conquer his introversion by taking up hockey, a sport for which he had little innate skill. He played goalie and practiced indefatigably until he made all-state as a high school senior; his career ended abruptly in college when another player skated over his neck, slicing it open and nearly killing him.

Dayton’s professional life has proceeded by a similar logic—a visibly difficult slog interspersed with a smattering of victories and the occasional messy disaster. Retail politics do not come naturally to him: He stutters through the punch lines in his speeches, or rushes through blocks of verbiage at near auctioneer speed. His eyebrows are permanently upturned, giving the impression

that he’s slightly terrified to be wherever he is. “Some of us, we walk into a crowded room, and we want to walk right out of it,” one of his former Senate staffers says. “Mark was that way—there was an anxiety about these situations.” As he worked the line of supporters at the DFL meeting, a taut smile on his face, there were glimpses of what he must have looked like as a young hockey player, steeling himself for the barrage of pucks that would somehow make him the person he wanted to be. “You’ve got to be a certain type of individual to want to be a goalie in the first place—it probably explains more about him than people realize,” Ongaro told me.

Dayton went to Yale—he was George W. Bush’s frat brother—and held penitential early jobs as a public school teacher in New York and a social worker in Boston, followed by a few years in Washington and state government. But he wanted to do something bigger. He first ran for the Senate in 1982, at the age of 35, self-financing the effort with \$7.2 million of his inheritance. At the time, his campaign was the second most expensive in Senate history—as well as, ultimately, the most expensive loss. The experience had a searing effect. Dayton spent the rest of the decade mostly out of the public eye; as his first marriage fell apart, he began drinking heavily, eventually drying out at the Betty Ford Center. In 1990, he won a more modest campaign for state auditor and by most accounts acquitted himself well. But he seemed listless by the end of his term and didn’t run for a second.

In 1998, Dayton lost a bid for the DFL nomination for governor. Trying to avoid the humiliations of 1982, he had operated his campaign on a shoestring but discovered that the one thing people find less sympathetic than a wealthy politician spending his own money is a wealthy politician asking for theirs. Another lesson learned, Dayton opened the spigot again in 2000 to beat Republican Rod Grams for the Senate seat that

PARNASSUS PERSONNEL: We are delighted to announce the appointment of Henri Cole as our new poetry editor. Cole is the widely acclaimed author of seven books of poetry, most recently *Pierce the Skin: Selected Poems, 1982–2007*. His verse is renowned for its mixture of stringency and sensuality, of austere philosophical exploration and unsentimental intensity of feeling. He has been described by C.K. Williams, one of his predecessors at TNR, as “one of the essential poets of our time,” and now he may become one of the essential poetry editors, too. In this issue we inaugurate Henri’s tenure with two new poems of his own—the last you will see of his work in our pages for a while, since we do not otherwise publish our poetry editor’s own writing. He can be reached at poetry@tnr.com, and all poetry submissions should be sent to him at poetry@tnr.com.

had eluded him 18 years earlier. His victory was attributed to two factors: the money and the arrest of Grams's son for car theft a month before the election.

Dayton's failures as a senator have been overstated—after all, he entered the chamber as the most junior Democrat during the nadir of the party's influence in Washington—and he was an outspoken critic of the invasion of Iraq at a time when the Senate could have used more of them. Still, his discomfort with the job was palpable. His former Hill aides describe a politician who was genuinely shocked by the partisanship of the post-Gingrich era, the difficulty of driving the legislative agenda as a freshman, and the tedium of fundraising—legitimate complaints all, but also the sort of thing that anyone who picked up a newspaper once in a while might have anticipated.

"Modern politics, he just saw it as unseemly," one of his ex-staffers told me. Dayton was also socially awkward and impatient, traits that would have made the Hill hell even in favorable political circumstances. "The Senate was downright incompatible with his personality," says Mark Andrew, a former chairman of the DFL who has known Dayton since the '70s. "Being a governor—I think being a chief executive is much more suited to his temperament."

THIS IS THE great hope of the season for Minnesota Democrats, many of whom believe that whatever Dayton's résumé looks like, his familiarity after 30 years of campaigning will be enough to prevail. As an added bonus, the departing Republican, Tim Pawlenty, is unpopular, and the state's GOP has supplied Dayton with a deeply unlikely opponent in the form of Tom Emmer, an archconservative and gaffe-prone suburban lawyer. "It's sort of like your favorite uncle coming in at the last minute to hopefully get everything taken care of and save the family from bankruptcy," says DFL State Representative Ryan Winkler, who backed another candidate in the primary but is now campaigning for Dayton. "You can't overestimate how much we feel that this is a crucial election."

There have been the inevitable Daytonian hiccups. In August, after two particularly pushy Republican Party operatives filmed him at a campaign event, Dayton held a press conference to denounce the ubiquitous practice of video tracking, accusing the Republicans of "intentional harassment"

and "intimidation of Minnesota voters." But Dayton's idiosyncrasies have become a known quantity for Minnesota Democrats—at this point, they seem almost reassuring. "I feel like I know this man," President Bill Clinton told the guests gathered at a downtown Minneapolis hotel for a fundraiser in September, as Dayton looked on. "He has a good heart and he has a good mind and what he'll do is predictable." For better or worse, that's probably true.

CHARLES HOMANS

Charles Homans is an editor at FOREIGN POLICY.

Inner Harbor

In praise of ports.

CÁDIZ, SPAIN

NO FAMED CHURCH, museum, or historical totem draws outsiders to this city on the Atlantic. So few come. Cádiz returns the lack of interest. Let the summer hordes swelter in Seville or Madrid. We'll feed and entertain you, the body language of the place tells a new arrival, but we don't need your validation. Take us as we are. And to be honest, the first impressions won't beguile. Arriving by road, you pass through an unseemly industrial area reminiscent of the New Jersey Meadowlands, followed by a banal stretch of modern beachfront Spanish architecture. Near the tip of a narrow sandbar, you hit the Puertas de Tierra at the centuries-old wall that separates the densely packed old town from the unremarkable new city. Then your parking headaches begin. But soon enough, in the cozy streets overlooked by enclosed balconies and cooled by a brackish breeze, you sense something special. An ease of spirit, a place open and lively, if more than a bit seedy, at once tolerant and insouciant, rakish, and raffish. This combination, you start to think, you've noticed in other ports and quickly come to appreciate here, just in bigger doses.

Walk around; the streets, built for another time, are impassably narrow even for the most compact of Eurocars. Before sunset, as Laurie Lee wrote, this is a place of "sharp incandescence ... sparkling with African light," with buildings that range in color from ochre to white. From the Plaza de España, near the inner commercial port, heading toward the ocean barely a kilometer away, attractive shops

inhabit well-kept eighteenth and nineteenth-century structures. At the Plaza de Mina, flamenco music mixes with the hum of outdoor conversation and laughter. Seemingly someone from every living generation of *gaditanos* (as the locals are called) is here, enjoying tapas and a twilight drink. A couple of kids dribble a soccer ball between outdoor café tables. By the time you reach the town's popular restaurant, the *taberna* on Plaza del Tio de la Tiza, you've reached the grittier part of town, the Barrio de la Viña, a place of dark alleyways and newer, shabbier buildings. The wait for the evening special, grilled *langostinos*, is long but worth it. Overt signs of the economic crisis rattling Spain are missing from this picture of restaurants that are crowded on every night of the week. One of the world's great mysteries is that Western Europeans, who earn and work less than we do, manage to have a quality of life seemingly superior to our own—although perhaps this is not so mysterious at all.

To its core, Cádiz is a port city—arguably the most port-ish of ports there is. Certainly, it is among the oldest. According to myth, it was founded by Hercules. The Phoenicians—in historian J.M. Roberts's phrase, those "traffickers in civilization"—opened their westernmost station here more than a millennium before the time of Christ, calling it "Gadir." It linked the Mediterranean with the Atlantic and assured a supply of tin. It has been inhabited without interruption ever since; the ancient Greeks, Hannibal's Carthaginians, the Romans, and the Moors all passed through. The Spanish took over about 800 years ago. These layers of culture are all visible: a Roman theater, largely intact; an Arabic medieval quarter reached through the Puerta del Mar, the thirteenth-century sea gate, and fetching neoclassical Spanish architecture. Kind of redefines melting pot, doesn't it?

Cádiz's golden age came in the 1700s, when the city acquired a monopoly on trade with Spain's American colonies. More than one-tenth of its population in those days was foreign. The city, home for centuries to the navy, prospered as long as Spain remained a world power. The Spanish still call it the country's "capital of commerce," although Cádiz went into decline around the time of Mexican independence and never recovered.

Ports nurture a likable sort of character. They are, by necessity, open to different kinds of people and ideas; willing to defy borders, physical or cultural, in a way that's harder to find in the hinterlands. Denizens of ports also tend to



know how to enjoy themselves. Each February, Cádiz puts on the best party in all of Spain, which is no easy feat; its famed carnival brings in the crowds. Its people are also by reputation Spain's funniest. (A sense of humor and mischief is another port specialty: Just spend some time with Isaac Babel in the Russian-Jewish Odessa of his stories, or visit today's rambunctious, though no longer very Jewish, Black Sea port of the same name.)

The hodgepodge of people, commerce, and good times carries with it political consequences. Throughout the years, trade has been the foundation stone of capitalism and democracy. So it was here, even if it took a while for the one to bring about the other. Two centuries ago, Cádiz was the birthplace of Spanish liberalism; the Spanish word *liberales* helped introduce the term to European politics. After Napoleon deposed the Bourbons in Madrid and installed his silly brother on the throne, a rival Spanish Cortes, or parliament, was established in Cádiz. The competing government drew up a new constitution in 1812—a liberal inspiration to others that provided for near-universal male suf-

frage and checks on the church and aristocracy. Spaniards didn't come to enjoy these rights in full until the 1978 constitution brought to life the post-Franco democracy. Not surprisingly, plans for a bicentennial party are already underway here, with red "CÁDIZ 2012" banners adorning street corners.

Melville would have loved Cádiz. If true freedom is to be found on the sea, as he put it in *Moby-Dick*, then a bona fide port city is its extension to terra firma. It is surely no accident that during the same period that Britain was the world's foremost naval power, its seafaring traders and shop owners, the future middle classes, led the push to temper the power of their kings. Contra Melville, Virgil. In the *Georgics*, the Roman poet praised "the husbandman/With hooked ploughshare turns the soil. . . . His chaste house keeps its purity." Yale's Ben Kiernan showed in his chilling 2007 book, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*, that georgic notions of agrarian Utopia have been adopted by tyrants to justify the murder of millions. Mao, Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot—and

the great would-be *génocidaire* of our times, bin Laden—were not men of the sea (or ports).

Cities are impure, ports most of all. Their messy charms refute the very idea of Utopia and, with just a bit of exaggeration, underpin our very civilization. The other night in Cádiz, the sound of a steady Arab beat drew me through a small passageway into the remnants of the medieval part of the old town and smack straight into a Moroccan dressed in the old Moorish fashion. He was hawking jewelry at the "Al Andalus market." Other stalls had Moroccan sweets, children's playthings, and clothes. Toward the Cathedral Plaza, the Maghrebian tune blasted through loudspeakers began to meld with a woman's voice, singing a Christian medieval tune. She was sitting on the cathedral steps, also dressed in historical costume. Was all this a bit of a cliché? Maybe. Kitschy for sure. Yet somehow it also felt genuine and true to this port's vibrant nature.

MATTHEW KAMINSKI

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If true freedom is to be found on the sea, as Melville wrote in Moby-Dick, then a port is its extension to terra firma.



ROLF HAID/DPA/LANDOV

What's Eating David Axelrod?

The disillusionment of Obama's guru.

NOAM SCHEIBER



"I think he's not having fun," says one administration official of David Axelrod. "He doesn't know how to escape the situation."

AMONG THE MANY distinctions David Axelrod has achieved in his career, there is one that requires special elaboration: He is, it turns out, one of the few customers to have ever run a tab at Manny's, the Chicago cafeteria and deli. This is not because the odd knish (\$4.25) or side of potato chips (\$0.75) threatened to leave him cash-poor. It is, rather, because Axelrod has long styled himself someone who accumulates haum at places regular people frequent, not the lacquered haunts of downtown Washington. What the Oval Room is to Beltway consultant-dom, Manny's is to Axelrod.

This detail helps explain why the chief strategist always insisted he wouldn't follow his boss, Barack Obama, to the White House. Axelrod considered himself an enemy of Washington groupthink, and not just on matters of culinary preference. There was, for example, that annoying Washington habit of carving voters into niches and plying them full of micro-spiels—more like a marketing exec surveying the cable dial than a leader bestriding history. Axe, as he is known, spent eight years at the *Chicago Tribune* before entering politics. And although it had been decades since he'd left the ranks of scribblers, he still

thought in broad narratives and stirring set pieces—"macro-trends," he'd joke. Among the deviations from the standard playbook that the Obama campaign made famous: an eight-day trip to Europe and the Middle East, a 30-minute infomercial costing millions of dollars, a nomination speech set under the Rocky Mountain sky (with no backup venue for rain!).

If the Obama landslide dragged Axelrod to Washington against his better judgment (his wife said he'd never forgive himself for staying put), the one judgment he never set aside was the inanity of D.C. custom. Even before Obama arrived at the White House, Axelrod had grand plans for scrambling protocol. Recent presidents had materialized at the Capitol like patriotic bunting. Axelrod imagined Obama traveling by train from Springfield, Illinois, gathering up ordinary folks along the way. "We wouldn't just bring their concerns to Washington, we'd bring *them* to Washington," says one inauguration official. Compared to the feats Team Obama had pulled off during the campaign, this one hardly rated as revolutionary. But you had to appreciate the symbolism. Lincoln took a similar journey to his first swearing-in. Besides, why give the Oval Room set its run of the inauguration? They could share it with the country.

LUKE SHARRETT/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

At which point things got complicated. Logistics aides pointed out that there was no direct route from Springfield to Washington—the train would have to make long detours through Chicago and Pittsburgh. The Secret Service worried it might not be up to the task of securing nearly 1,000 miles of track, to say nothing of the frequent stops. When Axelrod and his colleagues realized the trip could take a week, even they became discouraged. “We couldn’t hold the media’s attention that long,” says the inauguration official. “CNN on the fourth day of the whistle-stop would be like, seriously?” Reluctantly, they abandoned the idea, settling on a day trip from Philadelphia instead.

It was the sort of annoyance that seemed to greet Axelrod regularly in his new hometown. His relations with Senate Democrats got off to a shaky start last year when he tried to move a weekly Senate luncheon that he was scheduled to address, prompting grumbling over breached etiquette. Since then, he’s faced off with congressional Democrats over everything from health care (Al Franken once demanded Axelrod tell him when the president would “apologize for his stupid idea” of airing negotiations on C-SPAN) to general political strategy (House Democrats complained this spring that Obama’s stump speech was killing them). There have been public spats with the business community and differences of opinion with the Obama economic team. (Axelrod once e-mailed White House economic adviser Larry Summers wondering if he’d be more comfortable in the “cafeteria at Goldman Sachs,” though several administration officials say the ribbing is good-natured—Axelrod refers to Summers as his “brother in dishevelment”—and runs in both directions.)

Axelrod rents a spare, two-bedroom apartment in the Logan Circle neighborhood and sees his family in Chicago once a month. Friends routinely describe him as homesick and bone-weary. “This is an experience that you could never, ever trade away,” says his former campaign colleague Jim Margolis. “On the other hand, when he’s walking up 15th Street late at night going home from the White House, he’s probably wishing he was on the way to Lake Michigan.” Axelrod has told reporters he also finds it achingly difficult to be apart from his adult daughter, Lauren, whose severe epilepsy has left her disabled.

At a sturdy six-foot-two, Axelrod can look like a character out of a gritty police drama. He has a menacing, salt-and-pepper moustache and infrequently tamed hair. But other features betray him.

With his mournful eyes and the voice of a classical music deejay, he would never have cut it on “Homicide.” There’s also his gift for cringe-inducing puns, which have helped make him a beloved figure around the White House. (Axelrod on the plumbers’ union endorsement: “Are they flush with cash?”) Part mascot, part coach, he is known for two standbys at daily staff meetings: irritation over leaks to the media and jokes about whatever tie has become the latest casualty of his breakfast. As it happens, food mishaps are central to the Axelrod mystique. He was famous during the campaign for having disabled a BlackBerry with a stray piece of donut glaze. He once convened a meeting with a gravity-defying clump of oatmeal clinging to the frame of his glasses.

Internal camaraderie notwithstanding, the last few months have been especially grueling—a streak of lousy economic data and worse political news (the Gulf oil spill, the Charlie Rangel ethics scandal, the Ground Zero Islamic center) that would have tested any White House. At times, Axelrod has mused about returning to Chicago, but there’s no way out, at least not before the Democrats’ day of reckoning in November. “I think he’s not having fun,” says an administration official. “On the other hand, he doesn’t know how to escape the situation.” He is stuck in a city he never wanted to inhabit, surrounded by people at ease with the practice of ritual sacrifice. “It’s a hard town. It wants scalps. Sometimes he’s very dour about it,” says an administration veteran.

And yet it’s not as if the mores of contemporary Washington come as news to Axelrod, who has described the capital as a place where “too many people spend too much time kneecapping each other to certify their own importance.” “In terms of the short-term mentality, the unwillingness to take risks, the way every day is scored like the Super Bowl—all those things he believed, I think, have been confirmed in the extreme,” says David Plouffe, the former Axelrod partner who managed the Obama campaign. “But it’s not like he was caught by surprise. He understood that. It’s what he expected.” Which raises a question: What’s really eating David Axelrod?

MUCH HAS BEEN written of the famous December 16, 2008, meeting in Chicago in which the president-elect and his aides debated a massive stimulus package. During the meeting, Christina Romer, whom Obama had asked to chair his Council of Economic Advisers, reviewed the data on the economy’s spectacular collapse and de-

scribed the nightmare that would ensue without an adequate response. “This is your ‘holy shit moment,’” Romer announced, playing off a phrase Axelrod had used earlier in the day.

Less well known is the reason Axelrod had coined the phrase in the first place. Just before the larger meeting, Axelrod had huddled with the incoming economic team, including Romer and Austan Goolsbee, another senior aide, to hear their prognosis. The political team had polled the public’s knowledge of the crisis, and after the economists brought him up to speed, Axelrod lamented how little the average voter grasped its seriousness. “The world hasn’t had a holy shit moment, where they say, ‘Holy shit, we have to do something,’” he said, according to Goolsbee.

If you want to understand the overwhelming source of Obama’s political troubles, you can trace it back to this problem. The Bush and Obama administrations (and the Fed) stopped the spiral into depression. But the ordering of events most people observed—first the government intervened, then unemployment reached 26-year highs—made the response look like it had either failed or exacerbated the problem.

That Axelrod would home in on this from the outset—he told the president-elect after the meeting that his numbers would be in the toilet in twelve to 18 months and “all of us who were geniuses are going to be idiots”—is a testament to his legendary fatalism. In his recent campaign memoir, Plouffe recalls Axelrod as a brooding presence with a gift for finding the booby trap in every field of daisies. “This could be an unmitigated disaster,” Axelrod announced to Plouffe and strategist Robert Gibbs as Obama trooped off to his first primary debate.

Axelrod had been refining this mordant streak at least since young adulthood, when his career brought him face-to-face with the urban political machine—and its knack for crushing aspiring dogooders. After graduating from the University of Chicago in 1976, he won a coveted internship at the *Tribune* and parlayed it into a full-time job. For several years, he covered City Hall, which was dominated by Democratic apparatchiks. He saw the local political establishment as inbred and corrupt and naturally rooted for the reformers. “David came in with a different viewpoint,” says Bill Griffin, a colleague who hailed from a long line of Chicago cops and took a more sanguine view of the machine. “The independents—we would be dismissive of them. David gave them a voice in the paper.”

By the early '80s, the *Tribune* had promoted its chief political writer, a more conservative man named Dick Ciccone, to the position of managing editor. It replaced him with Axelrod, who used his weekly columns to flay the city's ruling class. Axelrod observed that, on the one day of the year City Hall welcomed public testimony, the mayor had fled to a nearby hotel to finalize the party's election slate. Another column compared campaign-funding laws in Illinois and Wisconsin. Wisconsin, Axelrod noted, had spending limits and public financing. "[O]ur own system of 'public financing,'" he wrote, "works like this: Employees, unions, lawyers, and businesses that reap tax dollars from government pour some of the money back into the campaigns of the incumbents to keep the spigot open."

Only in his late twenties, Axelrod appeared to have landed his ideal job. But there were strains. His predecessor, Ciccone, had the title "political editor," but management withheld it from Axelrod. When the paper transferred a writer from its Washington bureau to supplement his coverage, Axelrod "was pissed," as he told *Chicago* magazine in 1987. He also bristled at the way editors treated his copy. "He used to grouse, 'They changed this, didn't let me say that.' It happens to everybody, but he was very sensitive," recalls Jeff Lyon, a colleague and close friend at the time. He fumed when they buried a story showing how a leading mayoral candidate had stoked racial fears.

Axelrod's hypersensitivity notwithstanding—he couldn't touch coffee because it made him too jittery—it became obvious that management was thwarting him. "It might have been his politics," Lyon says. "The *Tribune*, even though it had undergone a metamorphosis of sorts ... was still far from liberal. David was a liberal." Whatever the reason, Axelrod grew increasingly frustrated. "He came out of a fairly affluent family in Manhattan. So it wasn't like he was devoid of any knowledge that people could do this," says Lyon. "But yeah, it affected him a lot. We've all had those kinds of experiences. They shape you."

One Saturday night in 1984, Axelrod met Lyon and a handful of colleagues for dinner at a Mexican restaurant. He announced he was leaving the *Tribune* to work as press secretary for Congressman Paul Simon, who was running for Senate. He was nervous but resolute. For years, he'd toyed with going into politics anyway. Now, he said, he was leaving because he didn't want to be kicked around anymore.

His dinner companions were stunned. "I don't think anyone said it was a brilliant career move," says Lyon. But, as it happens, the decision almost perfectly distilled Axelrod's mix of fatalism and brash idealism. On the one hand, he saw that he was being stymied by forces beyond his control. On the other hand, he was willing to trade a remarkable amount of success for a job that might not last six months (Simon was a big underdog) in a line of work he had no experience in, with a wife and two small children at home. The only explanation is that something about the liberal Simon—the picture of an anti-politician, with his horn-rimmed glasses and bow tie—spoke to Axelrod. And so he jumped.

IN THE spring of 2009, White House officials gathered in the Roosevelt Room to discuss the direction of health care reform. One of the looming questions was the so-called tax exclusion. Under the status quo, a worker making \$75,000 per year with no benefits would pay taxes on all his compensation. But a worker making \$50,000 plus \$25,000 in health benefits would only pay taxes on his income; the benefits would be untouched. This gave employers an incentive to provide generous insurance, which, in turn, led workers to consume too much health care. Pretty much every wonk in the administration believed that taxing benefits was essential. But the political team saw a problem: During the presidential campaign, Obama had criticized John McCain for a similar proposal.

Axelrod was especially concerned about reversing course. The campaign had run millions of dollars in ads specifically on the issue. To underscore the point, he screened a roughly ten-minute montage of every Obama ad blasting McCain as a tax-raiser. It was to little avail. By late July, when the president held an Oval Office meeting with several prominent health economists, it was clear he intended to endorse the tax (though it ultimately fell hardest on upper-income workers). Axelrod stood off to the side and said little.

As long as Axelrod was helping Obama capture the White House, it was easy to assume both men subscribed to the same worldview—not least because Axelrod's reverence for his candidate was irrepressible. Neera Tanden, a top Hillary Clinton campaign aide whom Obama hired for the general election, recalls Axelrod's pitch to her as follows: "Obama is a leader who tries to do the right thing. He's running a campaign that is a team and he has a core set of convictions and

believes in them. It would be great for you to see that."

Back then, the details of Obama's proposals had been less important than the way they advanced the broader narrative. Obama wouldn't just tout the benefits of health care reform. He'd point out that every Democrat since FDR had tried and failed to bring universal coverage; only a different kind of politician could succeed. But, for all they have in common, Axelrod is a liberal with a populist streak; Obama is more of a technocrat who leans left but generally shuns ideology. When it came time to govern, the differences between the president and his top political adviser became harder to finesse.

One of the first major political questions the White House faced after the inauguration was how to handle public outrage over bonuses at bailed-out companies. Missouri Senator Claire McCaskill offered an answer: a bill preventing any executive at a company on government life-support from making more than the president, or \$400,000 per year. "David liked that a lot," says a strategist close to the White House. But Obama ultimately sided with Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, who believed it would discourage firms from participating in programs designed to stabilize the financial system.

In the weeks that followed, Axelrod actually blessed the compensation plan the economic team devised. The idea was to tie pay to recovery—permitting large bonuses, but only once the companies had paid back their bailout funds. "What Axe railed against was not the idea of high compensation, but where it seemed divorced from the president's responsibility ethos," says one administration official. "Axe was fine with the initial guidance because it said you only get paid well if you bring your company back."

But, in mid-March, the press reported that AIG owed executives at its financial products division \$165 million in performance bonuses. Taxpayers struggled to understand why they owed anything to the people whose disastrous real-estate bets required a \$170 billion government lifeline, much less tens of millions in performance incentives.

The development shattered the tentative understanding between Axelrod and the wonks. Geithner believed that you cease to be an advanced economy once the government starts dissolving contracts. Axelrod and other senior political aides, like Gibbs, felt the administration had to respond to the country's legitimate outrage. They began to worry that Geithner's principled caution, while noble, could bring the administration down.

The president was exasperated but ultimately sided with Geithner on the letter of the law.

Politically, it didn't work. "If you were going to pick a moment when the whole thing turned on Obama," says a long-time Democratic consultant, "it was the moment the administration saved the AIG bonuses."

IN LATE APRIL, Axelrod and two aides met with a group of senior House Democrats in Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office. The ostensible reason was to share ideas for promoting the recently passed health care bill. But the meeting quickly evolved into a broader strategic discussion. Pelosi and her colleagues complained that Obama sounded more like an insurgent candidate than the occupant of the Oval Office. "A number of members of Congress ... pretty firmly raised the issue of the president going around the country saying Washington is a failure, a mess," recalls one person in attendance. "Who do you think is in Washington these days? We're in charge."

The tensions had been brewing for months. Leading up to January's State of the Union speech, the Axelrodian view of the world looked like it was finally as-

endant in the West Wing. In December, Obama protested on "60 Minutes" that he "did not run for office to be helping out a bunch of fat-cat bankers." In mid-January, he proposed the so-called Volcker Rule, which would prevent government-insured banks from placing speculative bets with their own money. "Axelrod in particular has been on it for a long time," one administration official told me shortly after. When Obama unveiled the idea, he slapped the banks for their stingy lending despite "soaring profits and obscene bonuses."

But when the president delivered his speech a few days later, the populist resolve had mostly vanished. Instead, Obama harkened back to the 2008 campaign, ridiculing the practice of "saying anything about the other side, no matter how false" and bashing the Beltway habit of treating "every day" like "Election Day." He elaborated on these anti-Washington themes throughout the winter and spring, despite pleas that he target Republican policies instead. "There had in the interim been conversations with some of the folks over at the White House on beginning to draw the contrast more sharply," says one House official. "People were surprised that the contrasts weren't being drawn."

In the months since the April meeting, the president's language has gradually become tougher, culminating with a searing critique of Republicans shortly after Labor Day in Cleveland. "We've clearly seen a significant change in the way they're presenting the issues," says an appreciative Representative Chris Van Hollen, who directs the House Democrats' campaign arm. Obama's assault on the GOP's maximalist tax-cutting demands has proved particularly effective, according to pollster Stan Greenberg.

Still, some Democratic operatives continue to worry that the president isn't as lacerating as the times require, that he's still too attached to his critique of Washington. Even in his Cleveland speech, Obama dwelled on the GOP's game-playing and obstructionism—"the only reason they're holding this up is politics, pure and simple," he said of one bill. His discussion of the party's radical legislative agenda was hardly exhaustive. "If voters could elect Republicans with a promise that all they would do is say no to Democrats, not the other crazy stuff, we can't win the election," says Guy Molyneux, a Democratic pollster.

Many of these same operatives believe Axelrod has long agreed with their advice

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but has had trouble nudging the president beyond his comfort zone. “With David, [you’re] pushing on an open door,” says one person who’s been in touch with the White House on these matters. Axelrod has always been harder-edged than the president, after all. “Barack would go everywhere but to negative. Rahm would cut your heart out. Axelrod is in the middle of that triangle,” says Jim Cauley, who managed Obama’s 2004 Senate race.

But when it comes to the idea of changing Washington—of uprooting a system that gives outsize influence to special interests and rewards hyperpartisanship—Axelrod and Obama see eye to eye. For good reason. It arguably accounts for the millions of first-time voters who backed Obama by large margins in 2008. Perhaps more importantly, Obama and Axelrod both believe in changing Washington for its own sake. “It’s in the president’s nature, it’s also in David’s nature,” says Stephanie Cutter, a senior White House aide.

Indeed, on the level of worldview, it’s probably their deepest bond. Dating back to his *Tribune* days, Axelrod has believed that the biggest problem with interest groups and party hacks is that they take for themselves what belongs to ordinary citizens. In Obama’s mind, special interests and partisanship corrupt good policy-making—both for the common man and everyone else. If it were up to Axelrod, the language of the Obama presidency might tilt a bit more populist. If left to his own devices, the president’s words might be a bit wonkier. (It’s hard to imagine Axelrod having written Obama’s policy manifesto, *The Audacity of Hope*, for example.) The place where they completely overlap is the belief that Washington must change. And so, rhetorically at least, they won’t give up on it.

That helps explain why, despite the pressure from members of Congress and every Democratic wise guy in town, Axelrod and Obama keep returning to some version of the anti-Washington message, albeit one that increasingly lays blame with the GOP. “The context for the Washington-is-broken argument applies today, to the midterms,” says Larry Grisolano, a top Obama campaign official who attends a weekly meeting with Axelrod and other senior consultants from the campaign. “It’s different than what we had [in 2008]. ... But he hasn’t discontinued where he’s coming from. He’s applying it to the current context.”

THE PROBLEM is that, while the administration remains rhetorically committed to changing Washing-

ton, at times it has abandoned the pursuit of that goal. In late February of 2009, Obama faced a small but telling decision. Congress had larded Bush’s final budget with earmarks, the spending that members can sneak into legislation without a vote, and which Obama frequently derided. According to *The Promise*, Jonathan Alter’s account of Obama’s first year in office, the White House legislative staff had heroically trimmed the number of earmarks from over 20,000 to 9,000 and urged the president to sign on. But Axelrod was worried about the old Washington stench. “Nine thousand or two—earmarks are earmarks,” he complained, in Alter’s telling. After some agonizing, Obama sided with his legislative aides. “We’ve got big stuff going on here,” he said.

During the campaign and the first months of the administration, it had been possible to believe Obama wouldn’t have to choose between his twin goals of passing legislation and taming Washington. But, over time, a combination of structural factors (the effective 60-vote requirement in the Senate) and circumstances (a Republican Party determined to oppose him at every turn) made the choice inescapable.

No progressive can begrudge Obama’s decision to sacrifice procedural change in order to notch big wins on health care and financial reform. But the tension between the administration’s rhetoric and its approach isn’t costless. “The strategy Obama had [during the campaign] is a great message for getting the country angry at Washington,” says an official who joined the administration early on. “But some would argue that it’s not a good message for achieving legislative victory that mires you in *not* changing Washington—in using the levers that are available in Washington.” If anything, Axelrod feels this tension more acutely than even Obama. “Barack is a pragmatist, Axe believes,” says Cauley.

Last spring, chief of staff Rahm Emanuel began pursuing a series of deals with interest groups—insurers, pharmaceutical manufacturers, hospitals—to grease the passage of health care. When Axelrod eventually turned to the issue, he became frustrated. The deals Emanuel was negotiating were moving the legislation forward. But they risked provoking a public backlash. “During the campaign we fought against insurance companies,” Axelrod said in discussions with Emanuel and the president. “After the deals with insurance companies, the deals with Pharma—all these people are supposedly our friends.”

It’s possible that Axelrod was speaking strictly in his role as a communications adviser. Certainly no strategist would relish explaining how “changing Washington” had given way to co-opting special interests. But there appears to have been a deeper revulsion at work. For one thing, Axelrod had been fighting the health care—industrial complex since his *Tribune* days, when his daughter’s medical bills consumed a quarter of his salary. And while he craved the end result of health care reform, the process had a way of mocking his principles. “David has a very idealistic streak,” says the official. “He does not see politics as the art of the transaction. He sees it much more in a human context, that people are motivated by a connection to something bigger than themselves. That view is just very different from passing legislation like health care, where you have to cut deals.”

That would certainly be consistent with Axelrod’s longstanding outlook. In late 2003, while he was working for John Edwards’s presidential campaign in Iowa, Axelrod began meeting with Joe Trippi, then the campaign manager for Howard Dean. “He was one of the few people [in the party] that was interested in what we were doing,” Trippi recalls. “Most of the other campaigns, candidates, staffs, thought we were Martians from outer space.” The two men would sit for hours at the bar in the Hotel Fort Des Moines and riff about the way the Internet empowered ordinary voters and undercut special interests. Trippi sensed Axelrod had a pang of longing for what Dean was pulling off. “I’m not saying he loved my guy,” Trippi allows. “But he wanted to change politics, and here’s something happening that’s changing politics.”

WHEN Axelrod was five years old, he fell in love with John F. Kennedy after glimpsing him from atop a mailbox in New York City. The first politician he fell in love with as an adult was a Chicago Democrat named Jane Byrne. Byrne was an unlikely reformer. She’d been a protégé of the longtime mayor Richard Daley and was serving as his consumer-affairs commissioner when he died in office. But Daley’s successor, a gray machine hack named Michael Bilandic, fired her in 1977 after she’d accused him of secretly negotiating a fare increase with local cab companies.

The following year, Byrne announced she was likely to challenge Bilandic in the primary. “His heart is not with the people, it’s with the bankers,” she said, according to a story Axelrod wrote for the

Tribune. "I'll raise money with contributions from the people. . . . I won't make any sweetheart deals." Axelrod and the younger writers at the paper were spellbound. "We cheered her on," recalls Lyon. In his story on the night of Byrne's primary victory, Axelrod called it the "upset of the century in Chicago."

Within months of taking over as mayor, though, Byrne proved to be a spectacular disappointment. She began stocking agencies with friends and family, cutting deals with the machine pols she'd promised to sideline. Axelrod was more disillusioned than most. One piece of his straight reportage early in Byrne's term began, "Apparently piqued over published reports involving her husband, the normally outspoken Mayor Byrne has curtailed her exchanges with press." (It went on to include this priceless deadpan: "Mrs. Byrne, who has declined to discuss her sudden reticence . . .") As a columnist, Axelrod bemoaned Byrne's fundraising quid pro quos. He joked that, for one contractor who'd siphoned \$1.5 million from city coffers, "it was a small sacrifice to return \$62,000 to the mayor's campaign fund."

In the end, Axelrod partly blamed himself for the fiasco. Trying to puzzle through how Byrne became "the mayor she ran against," he wrote: "[The lesson] is that voters should look at the history of a candidate in assessing the sincerity of their promises. There was little in Jane Byrne's background to suggest she would be the one who would finally clean up Chicago government."

Notwithstanding such self-reflection, the pattern of bubbling enthusiasm followed by disillusionment would recur in Axelrod's career. The campaign of Byrne's successor, Harold Washington, also inspired a certain romance in him, but soon he was grumbling about the mayor's disorganization and fecklessness. (Axelrod did later work for Washington.) As a consultant in 1990, Axelrod helped a wealthy lawyer named Dick Phelan replace George Dunne, the longtime president of the Cook County Board. Axelrod had worked for Dunne four years earlier; he eventually soured on Phelan, too.

In 1991, Axelrod signed on to work for another wealthy lawyer, who was challenging Illinois Senator Al Dixon in the Democratic primary. His commercials claimed Dixon was "Paid by the Taxpayers. Owned by the Special Interests." Dixon had a well-deserved reputation as a Washington dealmaker, but there was an added wrinkle: He was a close friend of fellow Illinois Senator Paul Simon, the man who'd given Axelrod his break in

politics. Years later, Axelrod would credit Simon's 1984 victory with launching his career. He regarded the liberal Simon as a father figure and would speak of him reverentially.

Several weeks before the primary, Simon began vouching for Dixon's bona fides and barnstorming the state at his side. Axelrod was crestfallen. In what he assumed was an off-the-record interview with *National Journal*, he laid into Simon as "an aspiring hack trapped in a reformer's body." "I think it's safe to say we were disappointed at Simon's rather strong involvement in propping up Dixon," says John Kupper, a longtime Axelrod partner who worked on the campaign. "Clearly, Dixon was not the reform candidate in that race." (Axelrod promptly called Simon to apologize and has said the quote was one of his biggest regrets; they reconciled and remained close until Simon's death in 2003.)

Whatever his tendency to fall in and out of love with politicians, there's no evidence Axelrod has soured on Barack Obama. Quite the contrary—he is said to take enormous pride in the president's legislative accomplishments. "When Obama rejects Axe's political advice, David's attitude is not like, 'Why isn't he listening to me?'" says one administration official. "It's more like, 'This is why I love this guy. He's willing to follow his heart even when the short-term politics are not with him.'" Instead, the source of Axelrod's disillusionment these days is Washington itself.

In retrospect, Axelrod's diagnosis from 25 years ago wasn't entirely right. The lesson of Jane Byrne isn't that her background left her unprepared to clean up City Hall, though that's certainly one reason she failed. The lesson of Jane Byrne and Harold Washington and George Dunne and Dick Phelan—and even Paul Simon and Barack Obama—is that cleaning up City Hall is unspeakably hard. Much more so than it appears to an outsider.

As long as he was a civilian, Axelrod could blame the pace of change on the flawed politicians he helped elect. He could always move on and invest his hopes in someone else. But now that he's serving in government, it's clear that the problem isn't so much flawed people—though, like anyone, Obama has his flaws—as a ferociously stubborn, possibly irredeemable system. For an idealist like David Axelrod, that may be the most terrifying thought of all. ♦

Senior editor Noam Scheiber is a Schwartz Fellow at the New America Foundation.

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Dispatch From the Knife's Edge

The coming Kyrgyzstan catastrophe.

JAMES KIRCHICK

THE MAN TELLS ME that the severed head is Kyrgyz. The video, relayed to me on the small screen of his mobile phone, is blurry and the sound quality is poor. But I can nonetheless decipher what is happening. A group of men are playing a macabre combination of soccer and field hockey with the detached cranium, shouting excitedly throughout as they kick and smack it with sticks. The clip lasts no more than 20 seconds.

We're standing in an alleyway off a major thoroughfare in Osh, a 3,000-year-old city located in southern Kyrgyzstan, the hustle of a bazaar only steps away. By now a small crowd has gathered around us, eager to see the violence on digital display. My grimace does not satisfy the man, an ethnic Kyrgyz dressed in black slacks and a black t-shirt, who wants to show me more. With a few clicks on the keypad, he proceeds to another video, this time of a man lying crouched in a doorway. As the movie starts, it's hard to tell if he is dead. But if he isn't, he soon will be. The sound of machine-gun fire crackles and a horde of men shout and cheer as the body shudders with the smashing of bullets. The limp figure begins to ooze blood from his mouth and chest. The gunfire continues as dozens of bullets, if not a hundred, are fired into the body. A man screaming "Allahu Akbar" can be heard over the din—a sure sign, says my interlocutor, that the perpetrators are Uzbeks.

For more than four days in early June, the southern part of Kyrgyzstan—a poor, landlocked country of 5.4 million people located west of China's Xinjiang Province—was wracked by ethnic riots. The violence pitted ethnic Kyrgyz, who make up a majority of the country's population, against ethnic Uzbeks, a substantial minority. Crimes were committed by both sides. But it was the Kyrgyz who controlled the levers of power, and who, motivated by rumors of Uzbek atrocities and perhaps by videos like the ones I saw, were responsible for most of the violence.

I had visited Kyrgyzstan for the first time in April—a heady moment for the country, which, just two days before my arrival, had ejected a corrupt, autocratic leader from power and now seemed on the path to a more democratic future. It was easy

to be swept along by the ebullience of Emil Umetaliev—then the owner of a popular travel agency, later the acting minister of economic development—who told me over tea at a trendy, Russian-owned café in the capital, Bishkek, that under the old regime his countrymen had been “like animals,” dependent on the government for subsistence and generally living in fear. But “after one night,” he said, his face lighting up, “they became like volcanoes,” brimming with ideas, energy, and a newfound independence.

Then the riots happened; and when I returned in July, it was no longer possible to feel anything but dread about

Kyrgyzstan's future. The stories I heard were unsettling, to say the least. Two weeping Uzbek women—standing in the burned-out hulk of a house that once belonged to family members—explained that their relatives, including an infant and a grandmother, were shot to death and left to smolder into ashes. Another Uzbek woman told of a seven-year-old disabled boy seized by a Kyrgyz mob, held down while gasoline was poured down his throat, and set alight. Two days before the riots started, one Kyrgyz-language newspaper had published an editorial thundering, “Without any doubt, under the current circumstances Uzbeks will become even more impudent if we don't attack them seriously.”

By the time the rioting was done, about 2,000 houses had been destroyed, the vast majority belonging to Uzbeks; the official number of dead stood at just under

400, though the actual number is widely believed to be much higher; and some 400,000 people, mostly Uzbeks, had fled the region. About one-quarter of them, women and children only, had poured across the border into Uzbekistan, where the repressive regime of Islam Karimov, a man said to have boiled political opponents alive, set up temporary refugee camps at the urgent request of international aid groups and the United Nations. But, after just two weeks of displaying his benevolence to the foreign media, Karimov—perhaps worried that the refugees could destabilize his own regime—sent his ethnic brethren packing, back to Kyrgyzstan.



Uzbek refugees return to Kyrgyzstan in June.

Now there is a sense of unease hovering over the country. No one knows whether upcoming elections will be a step toward democratization or a trigger for even more violence. Will the Kyrgyzstan that I saw in April or the one that I saw in July prevail? Many fear the worst. “Most of the Uzbeks we interviewed want to leave the country immediately, no matter where to,” a Human Rights Watch (HRW) researcher explained in August, following the publication of the organization’s report on the riots. As of July, those Uzbeks who could afford it were immigrating to Russia. Flights from Osh to Moscow and St. Petersburg were booked solid for the next few months. “I think Uzbeks cannot live here as they’ve lived before,” one Uzbek man, an English teacher at a local university whose home was destroyed during the riots, told me. “Genocide can happen.” That may be an overstatement, but it captured the sense of panic that many Uzbeks feel. It was easy to understand why they were afraid—easy, in other words, to see how uncertain Kyrgyzstan’s future is, and how ugly it could become.

THOUGH DERIDED by many of their Kyrgyz neighbors as outsiders, Uzbeks have lived in the Fergana Valley—a broad expanse that cuts across eastern Uzbekistan, through northern Tajikistan, and into central and southern Kyrgyzstan—for centuries. Like many citizens of former Soviet republics across Eurasia, they are victims of Joseph Stalin’s cartographic machinations, which were meant to contain nationalist ambitions through manipulation of ethnic differences. Craig Murray, a former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, describes Central Asia’s cruel borders as “a jigsaw cut by a one-armed alcoholic.”

Uzbeks are the merchant class of southern Kyrgyzstan, and while they only account for 15 percent of the country’s total population, they constitute about half of the south’s. As farmers and businessmen, Uzbeks are often perceived as wealthier by their Kyrgyz countrymen, who until the Soviet land reforms of the 1920s and ’30s were largely a nomadic people. (In fact, in a 2007 World Bank study, 47 percent of the heads of Kyrgyz households were classified as poor, in contrast with 55.5 percent for Uzbeks.) Though both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are Sunni Muslims, Uzbeks tend to be more religious. Uzbek women, for instance, normally wear head coverings, while most Kyrgyz women do not. The two groups are not always readily distinguishable by outward appearance,

though Kyrgyz tend to look more Asiatic, while Uzbeks look more like Turks or Iranians. They speak different, but similar, languages. The June riots were not the first instance of mass violence between the groups in Osh. In 1990, following a dispute over land allocation, some 600 people were killed in ethnically tinged carnage, spurring the disintegrating Soviet Union to deploy a military force for six months in order to quell the tension.

Kyrgyzstan’s first post-Soviet president was a cerebral former physics professor named Askar Akayev. Under the slogan “Kyrgyzstan—Our Common Home,” Akayev pursued policies of ethnic harmonization, supporting the construction of Uzbek-language universities, instituting Russian (the lingua franca of Central Asia) as an official language, and creating a People’s Assembly through which minority grievances could be expressed. But Akayev also grew increasingly authoritarian, and, in a 2005 uprising that came to be known as the Tulip Revolution, he was overthrown. His successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, proved corrupt and nepotistic. He was particularly disliked by the country’s Uzbek minority, which he shut out of national politics—and whose economic livelihoods were threatened by his patronage networks.

What ultimately did Bakiyev in was geopolitics. The Kremlin had promised him a \$2 billion loan, and he, in turn, promised to evict an American military base from the country—a base that serves as the main transit point for NATO troops on their way to and from Afghanistan. When Bakiyev announced that he would close the base last year, the United States promptly dangled an appealing financial arrangement in front of him and said it would start calling its facility a “transit center” rather than a “base.” (After Bakiyev’s ouster, it was revealed that his son owned the companies supplying the base with fuel.) Tempted by this U.S. offer, Bakiyev reneged on his deal with Moscow—which retaliated by increasing the price of gas exports to Kyrgyzstan, causing a sharp rise in utility rates. On April 7, an angry mob forced him from the presidential palace in clashes that claimed over 80 lives. Under cover of night, Bakiyev fled Bishkek for Jalal-Abad, a city in the south.

After a week spent hiding in his ancestral village outside Jalal-Abad—during which time he occasionally emerged to give fiery speeches denouncing the usurpers up north and grant surprisingly contemplative interviews to the international media—Bakiyev made his

way, via Kazakhstan, to Belarus, where he remains today at the behest of that country’s mercurial despot, Alexander Lukashenko. While continuing to condemn the interim government as illegitimate, he announced that he has no plans to return to Kyrgyzstan, instead hinting that he would enter a field markedly less stress-inducing: the production of children’s toys. “For kids to be happy,” Bakiyev told a Russian weekly, “environmentally friendly toys can help develop children’s intellect, bring them joy.”

Bakiyev was gone; but, in Jalal-Abad, his supporters were still a source of tension. In May, a group of Uzbeks descended on the governor’s office in the city, aiming to evict a posse of the former president’s loyalists who had violently seized the building. Leading the Uzbeks that day was Kadyrjon Batyrov, a wealthy businessman, university president, and prominent Uzbek leader. Batyrov had long been at the forefront of an unsuccessful campaign to pressure the government to recognize Uzbek as an official language, which enraged many Kyrgyz. Sensing a political opening for his community in the wake of Bakiyev’s ouster, he had increased his calls for greater Uzbek participation in national institutions, where Uzbeks are severely underrepresented. Though the central government had asked Uzbek leaders to assist them in launching the raid on the governor’s office, many Kyrgyz saw the incident as an ethnic provocation, not a patriotic gesture. Most news accounts of the event claimed that, after successfully forcing Bakiyev’s partisans from the government building, Batyrov and his followers proceeded to burn down the Bakiyev family compound, a charge that Batyrov denied. But the allegation was widely disseminated; and five days later, a Kyrgyz mob attacked Jalal-Abad’s Peoples’ Friendship University, a gleaming new building that Batyrov largely financed and which he had hoped would serve as a model of inter-ethnic harmony.

Ethnic tensions, in short, were already running high when the June riots began in Osh. The immediate trigger was most likely a fight between rival ethnic gangs at an Osh casino, which, thanks to a flurry of text messages sent from the scene to young men around the city and in surrounding villages, broke out into the street and resulted in a massive brawl. Rumors—later debunked by HRW—that a group of Uzbek men had raped girls at a dormitory also seem to have played a role.

Still, the question of who precisely orchestrated the violence—which both

HRW and the International Crisis Group (ICG) have accused Kyrgyzstan's military of helping to facilitate—remains a subject of great debate inside the country. Some blame Bakiyev loyalists. Roza Otunbayeva—a former opposition figure who became interim leader in the wake of the April revolution—told *The Washington Post*, “Bakiyev’s people, they found that this is exactly where they could really smash the government and smash the situation.” The genesis of this theory is a cell-phone call between Bakiyev’s son and brother, mysteriously posted on YouTube in May, in which the two seem to talk about plans for destabilizing the southern part of the country.

Another Bakiyev loyalist who has been accused of stoking the violence is the powerful mayor of Osh, Melis Myrzakmatov. “There are two presidents in the country,” one Uzbek man told me. “Otunbayeva in the north and the mayor in the south.” One of Myrzakmatov’s former deputies has said his ex-boss was “interested that there would be in the south, and in Osh in particular, some sort of destabilization,” and that the mayor “arranged sabotage against the new authorities, insubordination.” When I confronted Myrzakmatov with this accusation during an interview at his cigarette-stenched office in July, the mayor was prepared. He got up from the table where he was sitting, walked to his desk, and came back with a bundle of files. He claimed to be in possession of medical records proving that the deputy in question was mentally unstable. Asked what sort of mental affliction the man was suffering from, Myrzakmatov snapped, “He’s just a psycho.”

While many people blamed Bakiyev’s cronies, plenty of Kyrgyz were quick to blame Uzbeks. The June events, I was frequently told, were a plot to humiliate the Kyrgyz and earn international sympathy. One common theory was that Uzbeks had set fire to their own homes. Why Uzbeks would destroy their houses and flee the area in droves was always left dangling. Never mind how this idea contradicted the other chief allegation about the Uzbeks: that their real goal is to erect an autonomous region in the south or even merge with Uzbekistan. (If secession was indeed their objective, why would they immolate their own property, rather than that of the Kyrgyz, who presumably would have no place in an ethnic Uzbek enclave?) Several Kyrgyz I interviewed—educated, otherwise reasonable people—claimed that Uzbeks have a penchant for hysteria, and that their tales of woe were being exaggerated or falsi-

fied outright for sympathetic Western ears. “Uzbek women ... treat mosquito bites like a tragedy,” one memorably told me. Such Kyrgyz denial was abetted by state television, which devoted its coverage almost exclusively to the relatively small number of Kyrgyz victims of the carnage, all but ignoring the targeting of ethnic Uzbeks by the police and security forces. In a story related to me by a Western aid worker, one Uzbek woman expressed shock to see her ruined home depicted on TV with a weeping Kyrgyz woman standing in front of it.

Many Kyrgyz also blame Uzbek Islamists for the violence; Myrzakma-

ments they make in Bishkek and down here in the south about the involvement of the faithful in the events in Osh are an insult to Muslims,” he told me. “If we take the position of only one side, defending either the Uzbeks or the Kyrgyz, it would only end in conflict with the eternal law of Allah.”

Indeed, there is scant evidence that Islamist groups were behind the violence. But it is also undeniable that such groups are active in Uzbekistan; outside Kamalov’s mosque, I spoke to a member of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a pan-Islamist political movement founded in Jerusalem in 1953, with branches everywhere from

When I visited a statue in downtown Osh of a revered Uzbek poet, a noose was hanging around its neck.

tov claimed that “bearded men yelling ‘Allahu Akbar’” could be seen in the crowds swarming Osh over the course of the riots. To get a sense of the religious dimension of the conflict, I visited the Imam Sharahshi Mosque, which sits next to a fast-moving canal dividing Uzbekistan from Kyrgyzstan in the town of Kara-Suu, about 14 miles northeast of Osh. In 2006, Kyrgyz security forces, believed to be working in coordination with Uzbek intelligence, killed the popular Uzbek imam who led the mosque, Rafik Kamalov, in a shoot-out. Kamalov had been a strong critic of Islam Karimov, and the Kyrgyz government claimed that he was a member of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, a banned terrorist organization that has staged sporadic attacks in the region. (Kamalov and his family have long denied the charge.)

The congregation is now led by Kamalov’s son, Imam Rashod Qori Kamalov. About 2,000 men were at the Friday prayers I attended, and Uzbek border guards listened from the other side of the canal. Given the setting—an ethnic Uzbek town—I would not have been surprised to hear a militantly pro-Uzbek sermon from the imam. But, while the younger Kamalov did have some tough words for the perpetrators of the June violence—calling them “servants of the master of hell” and expressing hope that “their tongues go dry and their eyes go blind”—he also stressed coexistence and cautioned against reprisal. “We’re Muslims first,” he said over the loudspeaker. “Islam compels us to be brothers.” Round in form and gentle in disposition, he sat cross-legged and barefoot for an interview following his sermon. “These state-

London to the Fergana Valley. (Kamalov says he is not involved with the organization, which is banned in Kyrgyzstan.) According to a recent ICG report, “there is already talk within the Uzbek areas of Osh—largely secular and middle class, a long way from the Islamists’ core constituency in the south—of the welcome that the jihadi guerrillas would receive if they stepped up their activities in the south.” In other words, just because Islamist groups did not play a significant role in the June riots doesn’t mean that Uzbeks won’t decide to rely on them for protection in the future.

THE INTERNATIONAL symbol for distress—“SOS”—covers the roads and rooftops of Kirpichny, an Uzbek neighborhood in Osh. An easy way to tell the difference between an Uzbek and Kyrgyz neighborhood here—aside from the obvious fact that the Uzbek neighborhoods are nearly completely destroyed while the Kyrgyz ones are mostly untouched—is whether “SOS” is scrawled in chalk on the streets and on whatever remains of the homes. Weeks after the initial violence, as random security sweeps almost exclusively targeted Uzbek neighborhoods and the police and army detained Uzbek men for spurious reasons, the SOS signals remained.

There are any number of signs, large and small, that the violence could erupt again. In Osh, it was difficult to find any Uzbeks on the major roads. They were confined to their neighborhoods, the entrances to which they had blocked off with makeshift barricades during the riots. (The burned remnants of these fortifications, which the city government forced

them to dislodge, could still be found on the sides of the road.) Even in a bustling bazaar that borders an Uzbek neighborhood, I did not see a single Uzbek. They were staying in their area, keeping a deliberate distance of some several hundred feet between themselves and the noisy corner where transactions were taking place. “We cannot walk in the streets and work in the markets,” Salmoorbek Beknirzarov, an Uzbek, explained. “How can we survive? We don’t have any means for a living.” According to many Uzbeks in Osh, Kyrgyz have been hurling the word “Sart”—an epithet used throughout Central Asia to refer to city dwellers, but which has recently taken on a nasty ethnic connotation—with unabashed frequency. Small-scale violence has broken out sporadically in the past few months, including a brawl between Kyrgyz and Uzbek high school students on Septem-

tim’s relatives threw a glass bottle at the cage holding the defendants, while others attacked the defendants’ families with stones outside the courtroom. Western watchdog groups, meanwhile, allege that the charges against one of the accused, a prominent Uzbek human rights activist and journalist named Azimjon Askarov, were politically motivated, a form of retribution for his documentation of abuses committed by law enforcement authorities. Askarov, along with the seven other defendants, was found guilty on September 15. He was sentenced to life in prison, and the judge ordered his property confiscated.

Mayor Myrzakmatov has also proven to be an obstacle to reconciliation. Many Uzbeks blame him for the arbitrary security sweeps that disproportionately targeted Uzbek neighborhoods in the wake of the riots, and for the rampant

country in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan has a relatively free media and political environment. Many newspapers can be found at kiosks, and people feel able to share their political opinions with foreign journalists. Politics here have long been disputatious. In 2005, there were more than 100 political parties, and nearly 50 have been formed in the months since Bakiyev’s tenure came to an end. If the vote is free and fair, and if the winners—guaranteed to be ethnically Kyrgyz—go out of their way to try to repair relations with the Uzbek minority, the election could augur the start of a new era for Kyrgyzstan. But if aggressively nationalist parties win or if the results are disputed, the violence could easily resume.

Writing for *The Guardian*, Anna Matveeva, a fellow with the Crisis States Research Centre at the London School of Economics, recently envisioned three future scenarios for Kyrgyzstan, all disconcerting. The first is that the Uzbek community rallies around a guerrilla organization, as was the case in Sri Lanka with the Tamil Tigers. The second would be the Islamization of the conflict, along the lines of the Chechen separatist struggle, with Uzbeks turning to militant Islamist organizations. Finally, in response to either of these outcomes or without any such provocation, Kyrgyzstan could decide to clamp down on ethnic Uzbek protests with a decisive show of force.

One morning, I arrived at an Uzbek home where a group of distraught women were talking excitedly under a veranda. Traditional Uzbek homes have the appearance of ancient Roman villas, with open-air courtyards in the middle, and are often large enough to house an extended family. Passing through the kitchen, I entered a crowded room where two Uzbek men were receiving medical treatment from a Doctors Without Borders team. A group of drunken soldiers had assaulted them the night before for standing on a side street after the 10 p.m. curfew. One of the men, receiving stitches above his left eye, said he had been forced to sing the Kyrgyz national anthem, a ritual that, according to the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, has been commonplace in the wake of the violence, with multiple Uzbek men reporting similar humiliations. I asked the man for his name, and, like so many of the Uzbeks I spoke to, he refused for fear of his safety. “We are afraid they will come tomorrow,” he said. ♦

James Kirchick is writer-at-large for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and a contributing editor at THE NEW REPUBLIC.



President Kurmanbek Bakiyev (left) was forced from power in April.

ber 3. When I visited a statue in downtown Osh of Ali Sher Nawai, a revered Uzbek poet from the fifteenth century, a noose was hanging around its neck.

Part of the problem is that the central government seems to have little interest in improving the situation—or is just too weak. “The government is taking no proactive and energetic measures that could mitigate the chance of things going bad,” says Paul Quinn-Judge, Central Asia Project director at the ICG. A case in point was the recent trial of eight Uzbeks accused of killing a Kyrgyz police officer. The government’s decision to try the defendants in the south, rather than in a less fraught location, was interpreted by many as an indication of its disinterest in defusing tensions. And the trial was indeed tense. One of the vic-

police abuse documented by the United Nations and human rights organizations. He was chiefly responsible for stirring up popular opposition to a proposed 52-member, unarmed police observer force from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the dispatch of which was initially agreed to by the central government but now is unlikely to happen. He has successfully resisted efforts by the central government to remove him, and, emboldened by his ability to outmaneuver Bishkek, he recently declared, “We will transfer the capital to Osh.”

But maybe the biggest cause for concern about Kyrgyzstan’s immediate future is also the biggest cause for hope: the parliamentary elections scheduled for October 10. More so than any other

Downtime

On the overcontrolling parent.

JUDITH SHULEVITZ



IT'S THE HEIGHT OF CHUTZPAH for me to envy the mother in Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*—she's a bitterly poor immigrant in a walk-up in Brownsville, New York; I've got a babysitter and an apartment on Riverside Drive—but I felt a twinge of envy anyway when I reread the novel last year. After interrupting her sweeping to give her five-year-old son, David Schearl, a drink of water, David's mother gently asks, "Aren't you ever going down into the street? The morning grows old." And down he goes, this mama's boy, to the street and its little Jewish toughs. To usher my six- and eight-year-olds into Riverside Park on a sunny Sunday morning requires, let's just say, more effort. Playmates must be summoned via telephone or text. Drop-off and pick-up times must be coordinated. Parents must be pressed into service as chaperones or chauffeurs or coaches. The games the children finally play under our watchful eyes—soccer or scooting or monkey bars—are safer and more socially acceptable than the game of "foller de leader" that has David Schearl teetering on a railing outside a tailor's shop. But they are much less fun for the children and an outright chore for the grown-ups.

How did play get to be so much work? We New York mothers ask ourselves this question every fall, for while school gets our children out from underfoot, their menu of weekend and after-school activities turns us into full-time social secretaries. We could, of course, put the children in regular after-school programs, and many do. But if we don't, we must assemble a list of stuff to do, make playdates as much as a month in advance, and figure out which afternoons we'll ferry the children to activities and which days we'll let the nanny handle all that.

The rap on us is that we do this to ourselves. We keep our children off the streets out of an irrational fear of "stranger danger"—irrational, that is, in a city whose crime rate has declined dramatically over the past two decades—and overburden them with improving activities so as to ensure their entrance into Harvard. These charges are true, but don't get to the heart of the problem. It would be disingenuous to claim that the specters of competitive admissions and downward mobility don't haunt us or that we don't obsessively replay in our minds the disappearance of Etan Patz. But such things are too abstract to make us squander precious hours a day acting as event coordi-

nators. We do that because we think we have to. If we don't erect the invisible scaffolding upon which our children can escape from their living rooms into some other children's living rooms, or maybe even the park, we think they'll never be able to do it for themselves. They'll be stuck at home watching television or playing Wii or complaining when we won't let them do so.

The obvious comeback is that today's overscheduled children could use a little more downtime. That may be true, but what children really want, or so mine tell me, is not unstructured *time*, which in the absence of a playdate is often lonely, but unstructured *social interaction*, the collective effervescence that, if it isn't interfered with, gels into play. That is precisely what they can't have, because they no longer have access to the unmonitored spaces—the blocks, streets, yards, sandlots, fire hydrants, junk heaps, roofs, and sewer grates—where children used to gather, unbidden, for Red Rover or jump rope or handball or other games whose names were not recorded because they were less respectable.

It isn't just the city that lacks room for spontaneous play, though real-estate pressure is obviously more intense in the city than in the suburbs. I lived in Westchester for many years and found hardly any public spaces there either—a few playgrounds, many of them off-limits to children who didn't go to the schools to which they were attached; a few community centers that had to be driven to. The sylvan winding streets were nearly as empty of children as my Manhattan city block is. And it wasn't just that parents were afraid to let their children be "free-range kids," in the words of America's so-called "worst mom," Lenore Skenazy. It's that the children, especially those in their later childhood, had been swept off the streets into organized activities in remote locations, because any game worth organizing—and charging for—is bound to take place in a specialized facility, and it has to be organized in advance because otherwise no one will be around to play it.

This is a classic social trap, what a political scientist might call a deficient equilibrium: a bad situation that collaborative effort might remedy, but in which collaboration can't be sustained. I ran up against the difficulty of artificially recreating the conditions of free-form, drop-in play myself last year when my children and I tried to institute what we called "Playground

Wednesday,” a weekly gathering of classmates at the playground nearest to the children’s school. Everyone agreed it was a good idea, and by the second Wednesday a critical mass of children had appeared and exuberant games of dodgeball and Nerf swordfighting and who knows what else were played without adult supervision or quibbling, many of them on the broad lawn behind the playground that the New York City Parks Department has unreasonably put off-limits. Mothers and nannies were delighted not to have to hover or direct the goings-on in the odiously patient voice we adopt when we’d much rather be hanging out with one another. But entrenched patterns of private instruction and one-on-one playdates soon began to sap our numbers, and by the end of the semester my son declared the experiment a failure and refused to go himself. He experienced the poor turnout as a personal embarrassment.

He blamed me and my overcontrolling kind, and I blame us too, but for a slightly different reason. I blame us for failing to challenge the ethos of bourgeois individualism that prevents local governments from building cities and towns that are more livable for children (though it must be said that the New York City Parks Department has either built or fixed up 140 playgrounds since Michael Bloomberg became mayor in 2002). The German sociologists Helga and Hartmut Zeiher have done studies over the past two decades comparing the schedules of children in Berlin neighborhoods. One such study compared a working-class neighborhood with a middle-class neighborhood. The city had created a network of youth recreation centers and playgrounds in working-class areas, so there were several places within walking distance where a child could go to find a game of soccer, or table tennis, or just a good place to hang out. He or she didn’t need to sign up in advance, because the centers had learned that the children didn’t want to commit to specific activities at set times. No such center existed in the better-off neighborhood. As a result, the working-class children had fluid after-school schedules, shifting from one group or sport to another as their fancy took them, whereas the children of the better neighborhood had to make dates in order to do anything. They wound up developing a habit of hanging out exclusively in pairs, not in groups. They had learned the art of scheduling playdates from their mothers, who had planned all their social encounters when they were younger and may have found one-on-one playdates easier to arrange.

I have to say that I’m jealous, on behalf of my kids, of that second group of Berliners, too—at least they got to walk around the city by themselves. American children, on the other hand, are trapped, less by an overhyped fear of crime, in my experience, than by a completely legitimate fear of underregulated traffic or careless or drunken drivers. And so, children spend their lives being ferried from one island of childhood to another, from community center to playground to soccer field. Since these islands are either far apart or separated by busy streets, our children are our prisoners, whether we drive them or take the bus with them or arrange rides and companions for them. Of course, we’re their prisoners too, which is how I explain the harassed edge audible in the voices of the parents I eavesdrop on while walking down Broadway.

Even on their islands, the children can’t roam free. If you go to a playground, you must use the equipment that is given to you to use, which is why playgrounds so quickly grow boring unless they’re next to wide-open fields. And since city and suburban fields are coveted commodities and usually in use, if you crave a pickup game of flag football or Ultimate Frisbee, your best course of action is to sign up for after-school classes in those things. That’s what my son did, which is why he finally gets to play flag football in the park once a week.

Do I wish my children were part of a street gang, the way David Schearl was? I kind of do, and, of course, I kind of don’t. I was in something like a gang, and I did stupid stuff, and I survived. I grew up in an apartment on a block packed with apartment buildings in San Juan, Puerto Rico, at a time, the late ’60s and early ’70s, when the city was considered particularly dangerous for Americans. Bomb scares cleared my school two or three times a year. An old man was shot and killed sitting in his lawn chair on the beach in front of our building. Yet we had the run of the neighborhood. My brother and his friends used to surf on top of the elevator cab—I never understood why they weren’t crushed when the elevator was called to the top floor—and my friends and I used to wander down the beach, misdirecting tourists and happily pocketing the change they’d offer. We were mean and cliquish, too; each of us had to endure weeks of being shunned for some unwitting violation of the laws of cool.

I would never knowingly let my children get away with stuff like that and would never want them to experience social humiliation, but I do worry about what will happen to them if they don’t.

Last year I found myself in charge of an unusually large group playdate, half a dozen or so seven-year-old boys crammed into my apartment, and discovered, to my dismay, not that they couldn’t all get along—that was to be expected—but that they had no stomach for their own fighting. Every time an argument would break out about the choice of game or the distribution of lightsabers, a boy would run up to me. At first I thought I was being asked to adjudicate, but before I could figure out how to get out of doing so, I discovered that wasn’t what the boys wanted. They wanted me to turn on the television. If I turned on the television, they wouldn’t have to play anymore, and then they wouldn’t fight. I imagined legions of exhausted babysitters and mothers settling disputes in this way, and my son and his friends drawing the obvious conclusion: that group play is dangerous because conflict is intolerable, and that electronic entertainment is a good way to avoid both.

But what else is a parent to do? How *do* you find unstructured social interaction in America today? It’s hard to imagine American cities or even suburbs designing recreation centers like the ones in the working-class neighborhoods of Berlin, though I suppose that in some distant, less Europhobic future, it could happen. What I do instead of waiting for miracles is keep trying to clear out some fluid space and time in which my children and their friends can play together. The only way to do this is to get other parents to do it too. The logic of collective parental action seems to work poorly in the city, where a thinness of acquaintance and a wide range of class and ethnic backgrounds yields a paucity of trust, and everybody has too many things to do anyway. My efforts met with more success up in the Catskills this summer, when I and other parents in our little colony agreed to keep our older children out of a camp that’s really aimed at younger children and let them roam relatively unsupervised through the woods behind our cottages. Coincidentally, they were all boys, and they built forts. They changed forts about once a week, and we only had to shut down a fort once, when we learned that the boys were stockpiling purloined kitchen knives in it. They wanted to sharpen long sticks into spears, the better to ward off a group of younger girls, I think. We weren’t naïve. We knew that children who make up their own games are sure to concoct horrifying ones at least 30 percent of the time. We were ready to deal with that. Still, I have to say that we’re looking to hire an activities director for next year. ♦

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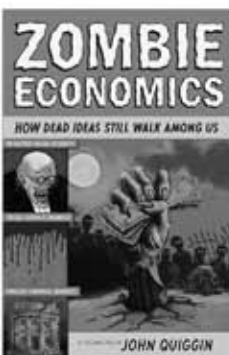
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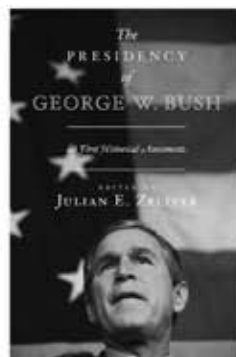


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Books & the Arts

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS WORLDS OF DIFFERENCE

THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT made a documentary about the Nuremberg trial in 1945–1946 that was shown in Germany in 1948. It is only lately being shown in the United States. Reasons for the delay are obscure: one surmise is that relations with the Soviet Union quickly cooled and our government didn't want to push a film that had the Soviets sitting alongside us in a tribunal. At any rate, *Nuremberg:*

Its Lesson for Today has now arrived, and it is valuable.

The work itself had to be rebuilt: over the years mysterious things had happened to the original negative and sound elements. Carefully, Sandra Schulberg (daughter of Stuart Schulberg, the original director) and Josh Waletzky found the pieces and assembled an eighty-minute film. No more than half of it is actually film of the trial. The original team was permitted to shoot only twenty-five hours of footage: what Schulberg and Waletzky found provided less than enough for feature length. The rest of the picture is buttressed and amplified with clips of war action and Hitlerian diplomacy. Some of these clips may have been included in the 1946 original, because they were used as evidence during the trial.

The cinematography is workaday black and white, and the soundtrack of this restoration is not always in sync. But the film techniques are as good as they could be. The picture starts with Justice Robert H. Jackson's opening address to the very large and crowded courtroom. Then come about twenty minutes of war film that summarize the reasons for the trial—the crimes against humanity. Then we get glimpses of the trial itself—charges, questions and answers, defenses. (Usual defense: the accused was busy with his own departmental work and didn't know what was going on elsewhere.) Then come the

summations by the American, Soviet, British, and French prosecutors. Naturally, all these sections are abridged. Then come the sentences, unabridged, read by a British judge. Three of the twenty-two defendants were acquitted. Eight were imprisoned, and eleven were sentenced to death. One of them, Göring, dispatched himself before execution with cyanide.

The most chilling of the trial material is not the various lawyers' talks or even the questionings. The crux is in the faces of the defendants, two rows of them in the dock—Göring, Speer, Streicher, von Ribbentrop, and so on—while the accusations are being read and after. Their expressions? Nil. They had evidently decided as a group to remain stony-faced, bearing out their basic position that they were patriots and military men serving their country in wartime, now being tried for their loyalty by the enemy that had conquered them. Not a twitch in those faces.

Their behavior brought back to this viewer memories of discussion about the very idea of the trial that began early. Can soldiers be tried for obeying orders? Wasn't the whole proceeding simply an expansion of the old Yankee gag: "Give

the man a fair trial, then hang him?" Nonetheless, acknowledging the immense legal complexities of the trial, some of us were plagued by a bitterness—about Kaiser Wilhelm II. At the end of World War I, the Kaiser abdicated and fled to Holland, where he purchased a small castle. The American press felt that it needed to visit him occasionally (he died in 1941) and print a photo. So from time to time we were treated to a picture of the Kaiser, a man who had been involved in the slaughter of millions,

tending his roses or healthfully chopping wood. We never wanted to see photos of Streicher tending his roses.

This reconstituted film puts the complicated trial before us again expressly to inveigh against aggressive war. This is the lesson of the subtitle, which was part of the original. It was doubtless a bit less ironic in 1946.

BACK TO civilization with Glenn Gould. He still lives. Literally, he died in 1982 at age fifty. Like many other musicians, his performances—in his case, fabulous imperial piano—are still there to exalt us. But unlike most of his fellows, he also survives as a person—in film. In 1993 François Girard made a lovely picture called *Thirty-Two Short Films About Glenn Gould*, a gallery of improvisations about some facts and moods and interests in the pianist's life. Now comes a straight documentary, *Genius Within: The Inner Life of Glenn Gould*, by Michèle Hozer and Peter Raymont.

Why? The reason, stated in the title, is perennial. Essentially, this is another search for an explanation of genius. When talent occurs, we can accept it, because there is so much of it; but genius is unsettling. We want to know why, how. Family background is no clue: many geniuses came from humdrum families.

**NUREMBERG:
ITS LESSON
FOR TODAY**
SCHULBERG
PRODUCTIONS

**GENIUS
WITHIN:
THE INNER
LIFE OF
GLENN GOULD**
LORBER FILMS

**KINGS
OF PASTRY**
FIRST RUN FEATURES



Early recognition sometimes occurs, sometimes not. As an answer to the basic question, this new film is little aid: we still don't understand why this gangly youth from an average Toronto family, encouragers though they were, set the musical world ablaze. Whence came the gift? As far as Hozer and Raymont are concerned, despite their film's title, the world will still have to keep asking the same old questions about genius.

But they do paint a portrait of the man and his peculiarities. The directors have found film of Gould at various ages and have done recent interviews with people who knew him, and at least we get some acquaintance with him. He was a peculiar fellow: he ranged from being a commonplace regular guy, deliberately yet naturally so, to the tempestuous virtuoso that great artists often are. One sidewise example: in a now-historical incident, Leonard Bernstein explained to an audience before a Philharmonic concert that the Brahms concerto interpretation they were about to hear was Gould's interpretation, not his.

We get generous portions of Gould's playing, though of course not enough, and often we hear his piano tinkling in the background of conversations (understandable as a device, though a constant tease). We never see him on stage, but we hear a considerable amount about how he disliked appearing in concert. He began to feel, apparently, that performing in public was "performing" in public. He frequently canceled appearances unexpectedly. After twenty years of concertizing he completely quit in 1964, and for his last eighteen years he did all his public playing on recordings and on radio.

His private life had its own anomaly. He and a married woman fell in love: she eventually moved in with him, but brought her children with her and kept her ties to her husband. For a considerable time it was a threesome with children. To increase the uniqueness, one of the children, now an adult man, talks of those trio days with tenderness.

At the time Gould's decision to quit the stage was thought to be Gouldian eccentricity in extremis. He may or may not have had a vision of the electronic future, but we who are entering the new digital cosmos can now think that perhaps he was a pioneer.

THE cream puff is something very basic." A film with that comment as its credo is sure to be engrossing. *Kings of Pastry* proves the point.

This is a documentary about a competition that is held every four years in France.

A group of first-rank pastry chefs—during the year the film was made, there were sixteen—compete for three days under the eyes of masters, preparing petits fours and tarts and lollipops and wedding cakes. At the finish the judges award collars to some of them. A collar puts a chef among the *Meilleurs Ouvriers de France* (MOF)—the best French craftsmen. This baking contest arouses an interest among some French people that may be exceeded only by the World Cup.

The famed American documentarians D. A. Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus (husband and wife) have brought a sense of that fervor and some insight into the personal elements involved to their very skillful film. Their first good idea was to find a French pastry chef in America—Jacquy Pfeiffer, who teaches in Chicago—and follow him as cicerone when he returns, first to his native Alsace, where he practices, then to the competition. He explains in English as he goes, and he soon readjusts our standards of seriousness.

Brushing aside facile notions of French frivolity, we begin to wonder why it is more serious to see who can run a hundred yards fastest than to see who can make the best cream puffs. Skills are cer-

tainly at least as exigent for the chefs as for the runners, and when the contest is over, there is evidence to certify victory.

No women compete—at least not this year—but then, as I recall, Michelin is weak in female chefs of any sort. Present, however, are devoted wives who support and encourage their husbands as might the wives of race car drivers. The strain on the chefs is great. All are highly experienced, of course, some of them from famous restaurants, but afterward one of them, who has not won a collar, says that he is drained, exhausted: he could not go through this again.

Accidents can be providential for documentary makers, and Pennebaker and Hegedus benefit from one. On the last day each of the chefs has to fill a table of his own with the results of his trial, after which the judges will inspect visually, then taste. The camera happens to be focused on a chef who is lifting his complicated sugar sculpture onto his wedding cake when it suddenly collapses. His reaction and the warmth of his fellows help to steep the picture in our sympathy as well as excitement. And of course we are also steeped in jealousy of the judges, who, in a little while, will do the tasting of all those tables. ♦

Steven Hahn

THE ROAD TO MASTERY

Jazz and race in America.

I.
DURING ONE OF his engagements at the Cotton Club in the mid-'30s, Duke Ellington spotted Leopold Stokowski sitting near the stage a short time before the start of the show. Stokowski had always wanted to meet Ellington and hear him conduct his music, and when Ellington came over to greet him Stokowski asked what he was "striving for." By one account, Ellington replied: "I am endeavoring to establish unadulterated Negro melody portraying the American Negro." And, indeed, at the show's end, Stokowski thanked Ellington, invited him to a concert the next night at Carnegie Hall, and exulted: "Mr. Ellington, now I truly understand the Negro soul."

Stokowski, himself a bit of a showman as well as a renegade in performing the works of living composers, was not alone in the classical world in admiring and learning from jazz. Stravinsky, Schoen-

berg, Hindemith, and Ravel all acknowledged the influence of jazz rhythms and syncopation in their compositions, as did Aaron Copland, who thought in 1927 that jazz could become "the substance not only of [the American composer's] fox trots and Charlestons but of his lullabies and nocturnes." Together they demonstrated how deeply embedded and generative jazz had become in the musical and artistic culture of modernism in the early twentieth century. Yet the encounter between Stokowski and Ellington suggested something more: how entwined ideas of race and communities of ethnicity or nationality could be in the modernist project itself.

Jazz is widely understood as America's great and distinctive contribution

Steven Hahn teaches at the University of Pennsylvania and is the author, most recently, of THE POLITICAL WORLDS OF SLAVERY AND FREEDOM (Harvard University Press).

to a world of music in which Europeans commonly held pride of place. Less well understood, or appreciated, is the rapidity with which this musical form grew from a relatively small node of expression among the country's most socially and politically suppressed people into one of the most dynamic, complex, and internationally recognized cultural idioms. By the time Leopold Stokowski met Duke Ellington, jazz was little more than three decades old, and jazz recordings were less than two decades old; the era of the big bands, when jazz briefly became America's most popular music, was only dawning. Twenty years later, Eric Hobsbawm could write that "there is probably no major city in the world in which someone is not playing a record of Louis Armstrong or Charlie Parker, or of players influenced by these artists," and the Department of State could send jazz musicians on overseas tours as valuable resources in the Cold War. By the 1950s and 1960s, in fact, the audience for jazz was undoubtedly larger outside the United States than in it, and the interplay among the musicians themselves encompassed the Caribbean and Africa as well as Europe. How this happened, and the role that people of African descent played in it, is one of the great cultural stories of the past century. The lives of some of jazz's most revered artists help us to glimpse the rich relations between the music and the tumultuous world in which it grew.

FOR MANY AMERICANS who came of age in the years after World War II, Louis Armstrong, with his white handkerchief and sweaty brow, his cascading trumpet notes and gravelly voice, his wide eyes and his broad toothy grin, was what we would now call a pop icon: a regular on "The Ed Sullivan Show" and best known, perhaps, for his chart-topping version of "Hello Dolly" in the early '60s. He was one of a handful of black entertainers who managed to win a large white audience, and at a time of escalating agitation for civil rights and black community empowerment this broad appeal brought him grief as well as fame. More than a few African Americans, especially among the young, bridled at what they saw as Armstrong's accommodating demeanor, his apparent subservience to whites, his "Uncle Tomism." But the harshest verdicts were pronounced by those musicians and critics who believed—erroneously—that Armstrong had strayed from his jazz roots, had "sold out" for a run at the main chance and stardom.

Armstrong was present at the creation of what we have come to recognize as jazz, and his part in the early development of the music was nothing short of extraordinary. Born in black New Orleans just after the turn of the twentieth century—he always insisted that his date of birth was July 4, 1900, but in truth it was August 4, 1901—to poor and struggling parents, Armstrong had more than his share of difficulties growing up. His father, who worked in a turpentine factory, soon abandoned the family, and his mother, a domestic who likely worked in the sex trade, left him with his paternal grandmother. At age twelve, after being arrested for firing a gun during a New Year's Eve celebration, he ended up in the Colored Waifs'

POPS:

A LIFE OF LOUIS ARMSTRONG

By Terry Teachout
(Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 475 pp., \$30)

DUKE ELLINGTON'S AMERICA

By Harvey G. Cohen
(University of Chicago Press, 688 pp., \$40)

THELONIOUS MONK:

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF AN AMERICAN ORIGINAL

By Robin D. G. Kelley
(Free Press, 588 pp., \$30)

PRINCESS NOIRE:

THE TUMULTUOUS REIGN OF NINA SIMONE

By Nadine Cohodas
(Pantheon, 449 pp., \$30)

Home for Boys for a year and a half. But the young Armstrong lived in a musical environment that pulsed with creative energy and innovation.

New Orleans was an old Southern city, but in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century it was at a vibrant social and cultural crossroads. Long influenced by French, Spanish, and African peoples, and by the Creoles who came of their intermixing, the city also became an important meeting ground for the first generation of Southerners born after emancipation. Not incidentally, a light-skinned man of color, Homer Plessy, whose forebears were among the refugees from the Haitian Revolution, challenged the constitutionality of a new Louisiana law that required racial separation in railroad cars (this was the infamous case of

Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896), attempting as it did to choreograph encounters between the races. It was, in fact, the confluence of a number of novel musical forms heard up and down the Mississippi Valley at roughly the same time—say, between 1880 and 1910—that flowed into the making of jazz, and may explain why New Orleans became its apparent birthplace: ragtime in the river towns of Missouri and blues on the plantations of the Arkansas–Mississippi Delta combined with the tradition of brass bands in the Crescent City. Jazz began as a Lower Mississippi Valley phenomenon—though unlike the blues, it was decidedly urban and depended on the cultural magnetism that New Orleans exerted.

As a young boy Armstrong was drawn to the music of the local cornetists Buddy Bolden, Bunk Johnson, and King Oliver. With money borrowed from an immigrant Jewish family for whom he briefly worked (he would later wear a Star of David in part as a testament to their kindness), he bought his first cornet. He probably taught himself a few tunes and then, at the Colored Waifs' Home, got a chance to play in the band, where he seemed to thrive. "Me and music got married at the home," Armstrong later reflected. By the time he left the Home, the term "jazz" (often spelled "jass") was first appearing in print—though the distinction between jazz and ragtime remained hazy—and he could play well enough to earn some cash and to attract the attention of King Oliver, who took Armstrong under his wing and tutored him informally. Drawn to older men who could serve as father figures, Armstrong formed a particularly significant bond with Oliver.

Although Terry Teachout does not add much that is new to this story, he does paint a vivid portrait of Armstrong and his early world, and his book identifies the historical forces and events that would mark Armstrong's musical ascent: most prominently the Great Migration, which took many thousands of African Americans out of the rural and urban South and into the urban North. Oliver left New Orleans for Chicago in 1918, and Armstrong, now a top-rate local cornetist, took his place in Kid Ory's band. With an assortment of gigs in brass bands and on Mississippi River steamers, and a reputation as one of the best jazzmen around, Armstrong seemed quite comfortable staying in New Orleans, at one point turning down an offer to go to New York and play with the famous Fletcher Henderson band. But in 1922, King Oliver summoned him to Chicago, and Armstrong headed north.

Oliver's Creole Jazz Band was among the most popular dance bands on Chicago's South Side, and although Oliver's concern was with ensemble work rather than with individual improvisation, Armstrong was happy to settle in as second cornet. But the band's pianist, Lillian Hardin, with whom Armstrong became involved (he was already married, though his wife had stayed behind in New Orleans), pushed him to go out on his own. Before too long Fletcher Henderson was able to hire him away, and Armstrong soon attracted notice at Roseland and the Apollo Theater in Harlem. Most important, he stepped forth with trailblazing solos that stunned his audiences and fellow musicians alike. With those solos, jazz took an enormous leap forward.

ARMSTRONG HAD MADE some recordings with the Creole Jazz Band and the Henderson orchestra, but it was a series of sessions in the OKeh studios (a central player in the production of "race records") in Chicago between 1925 and 1928 that defined the moment in jazz history, putting his startling new music within reach of a large listening public. With combos known as the Hot Five and Hot Seven, eventually joined by the pianist Earl "Fatha" Hines, Armstrong cut sixty-five sides, including the swiftly canonical "Cornet Chop Suey," "Potato Head Blues," "Struttin' with Some Barbecue," and, perhaps most influential of all, "West End Blues," with triplet arpeggios reaching high C that Teachout calls "the most technically demanding passage to have been recorded by a jazz trumpeter up to that time." The sides also included "Heebie Jeebies," where halfway through an otherwise unremarkable piece Armstrong first begins to sing in his distinctive raspy voice—"I've got the heebies, I mean the jeebies"—and then goes on to scat—"eeef, goff, oomff, deebuht, deedle-la-bahm, rrrip-bip-di-doo-di-doot"—a New Orleans invention that Armstrong made his own. Selling like hotcakes in Chicago, these records established him as "the most important soloist in jazz" and "the man to whom other musicians looked for inspiration."

The commercial success of Armstrong's recordings would set him on a new track. Already in the 1920s, Harlem's stride pianists, the emerging rhythms and dance steps of "boogie-woogie," and the orchestral dispensation of New Orleans—Chicago brass helped inspire the big bands of what would come to be known as the "Swing Era," with a popular appeal well beyond anything jazz had yet known. Indeed, the big-band sound would be

closely associated with white musicians and band leaders such as Benny Goodman, the Dorsey Brothers, Harry James, and Glenn Miller, and it would vibrate in many corners of the United States. Sensing the prospects, OKeh recording director Tommy Rockwell, and a bit later Joe Glaser, began to "repackage" Armstrong less as a purveyor of hot jazz and more as an entertainer capable of attracting white as well as black listeners.

It was a move that reflected both new mass marketing sensibilities and racial boundary-crossing in what was still the age of Jim Crow. For the next two decades, Armstrong worked chiefly with big bands rather than small combos, and dramatically expanded his repertoire and artistic activities. He played and recorded blues, ballads, show tunes, and pop songs as well as jazz standards, with his voice probably surpassing his trumpet in recognition. He crisscrossed the country on a grueling schedule of performances and toured Europe, following in the footsteps of the New Orleans clarinetist Sidney Bechet and the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. He appeared in a number of Hollywood films, mostly in musical-comedic roles. He sang with Bing Crosby. And he helped open the radio airwaves to black performers. At a time when the Great Depression crippled the recording industry and undermined the careers of many black jazz and blues artists, Armstrong was rapidly becoming a star.

Ironically, the crisis would come for Armstrong well after the Depression had ended and as the country entered the postwar era. The days of the big bands came to an abrupt end around 1946–1947, owing to the impact of the war, the costs of the operation, and probably the limitations of the musical genre, which tended, in the hands of many practitioners, to the formulaic. Perhaps equally important was the birth, in the early '40s, of bebop. It was a technically demanding style, oriented to listening rather than dancing, most suitable for small groups and rotating solos, and generally disdainful of swing-style showmanship. Armstrong, who had eclectic musical tastes, nonetheless reacted quite negatively, telling one columnist that bop "doesn't come from the heart the way real music should" and that it threatened public interest in jazz.

But with the help of Glaser, Armstrong found his way back, leaving the big band behind and resurrecting a combo—the All Stars—who would be his touring companions for the rest of his career.



They debuted at Billy Berg's Vine Street jazz club in Los Angeles, and soon could be found in the pages of *Time*, with Armstrong on the cover, and on television. By the mid-'50s, Armstrong had, in the words of Teachout, "settled comfortably into middle-aged renown," commanding "top fees" and working "as often as he liked."

Indeed, given his early troubles with the police (he was arrested more than once), the tax office, and the Mob (through one of his agents), Armstrong emerged in remarkably good shape, at least for a mid-century jazzman.

He avoided the narcotics that destroyed many of his colleagues, though he did smoke marijuana nearly every day. He found a stable home life, including a modest house in the Corona section of Queens where he remained despite his growing wealth, though his marriage to Lucille Wilson was his fourth, and on the road he did tend to stray, fathering more than one child. And he achieved enormous public recognition. Armstrong was also a prolific writer. He published two books, including, in 1954, the well-regarded *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans*, and more than two dozen magazine articles. He left hundreds of letters and many pages of unpublished autobiography, and he recorded hours of music and conversation on tape. His typewriter and his tape recorder joined his trumpet as essentials that he would carry everywhere.

But Armstrong was stung by criticisms of his musical choices and racial demeanor. As Teachout notes, he never considered his time with big bands and then the All Stars as a retreat or deflection from his musical creativity of the 1910s and 1920s. Quite the contrary. He thought that he did his most "interesting work as I have gotten up into the older age bracket." Armstrong also reminded critics of the many things he did to "uplift my race." He flouted the color line in many states by refusing to play where he could not stay. He avoided socializing "with the top dogs" even if he was invited. He always performed with integrated bands and combos, feeling it important for audiences to watch "Negro and white musicians play side by side." When the state of Louisiana prohibited interracial groups from playing in bars and clubs, he stayed away from New Orleans until the Civil Rights Act was passed. "I don't care if I never see New Orleans again," he scowled.

Privately Armstrong spoke more pointedly, insisting that the "majority of white

people ... [don't like] niggers, but they always got one nigger that they just crazy about, goddamn it." But in the midst of the attempted desegregation of Central High in Little Rock, he went dramatically public, deriding the Eisenhower administration for its cowardice. The president, he exclaimed, was "two-faced" and had "no guts," and Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus was a "no-good mother-fucker." "It's getting almost so bad," Armstrong sighed, "a colored man hasn't got any country." Dizzy Gillespie, the bebop hero who once called him "a plantation character," took due note.

II.

DUKE ELLINGTON struggled more self-consciously than did Louis Armstrong with the relation between his music and his sense of racial identity. His extended composition *Black, Brown, and Beige: A Tone Parallel to the History of the Negro in America*, his musical revue *Jump for Joy*, his film projects such as *Black and Tan* and *Symphony in Black: A Rhapsody of Negro Life*, and the many benefits he played for the NAACP and other black organizations—all this not only represented a musician's efforts to disturb racial stereotypes and to offer a complex, historical rendering instead; they were also means to express racial pride and translate the black experience into musical form. By the 1930s, Ellington became known in various black communities as a "race leader."

But Ellington struggled also for artistic recognition, for a renown that was difficult to come by for any American musician or composer during the twentieth century, let alone for one of African descent. And this pursuit, as Harvey G. Cohen shows in his impressive biography, set him on a trajectory that bears a resemblance to Armstrong's. To be sure, their origins, for black Americans, could not have been more different. Edward Kennedy Ellington was born in Washington, D.C. on April 29, 1899 to a family that was economically secure in a city that was a bastion of the black middle class. His mother, who played some piano, doted on her son and may have contributed to the demeanor that earned him the nickname "Duke." (There are several stories about the moniker, some involving his dress.) He liked sports and art, and was offered a scholarship to New York City's Pratt Institute; and he attended segregated schools that took black history and talents seriously, countered negative racial imagery, and encouraged students to feel self-confident and proud of who they were. If anything,

many of the black students looked down their noses at the white youth with whom they otherwise might have been schooled, accounting perhaps for Ellington's later misgivings about school desegregation.

Ellington gravitated to music and, other than some early piano lessons, he was, like Armstrong, effectively self-taught. Despite the urging of friends and family, he never went to a conservatory, where, he assumed, the black musical tradition would be ignored. Instead he received informal mentoring in sight reading and musical theory while he hung around with local and touring jazz and blues musicians, especially stride pianists, from whom he learned technique.

By the time he was in high school, he was forming bands and, helped by his father's connections (his father was a society caterer and does not otherwise figure in Ellington's life story), played for white and black audiences alike, mixing dance tunes with waltzes, ragtime, blues, and the new sounds of jazz.

After being scammed by a booking agent, Ellington learned how to manage the band's musical and business affairs, a skill that would serve him well. He started to earn a good living, bought a house, got married and had a son, and drove a car. But as Washington, D.C. came under the pall of Jim Crow during Woodrow Wilson's presidency, Ellington looked for a

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new base. In early 1923, leaving his family behind, he headed to New York.

NEW YORK WAS a tough town to break into, and Ellington was increasingly interested in composing and arranging as well as performing. Some of New York's top stride pianists—Fats Waller, James P. Johnson, and Willie “The Lion” Smith—heard him and offered encouragement, and Ellington managed to put together a band and make some recordings. Most important, however, was his decision, in 1926, to take on Irving Mills as a business manager. Somewhat in the manner of Armstrong's Joe Glaser, Mills was white and Jewish and had experience in the music business. For the next thirteen years Mills and Ellington carried out what Cohen, in his best and most innovative chapter, calls a “marketing plan” designed to make Ellington a national and international star with a reputation as an important composer.

Mills pushed Ellington and his band to play the “sweet jazz” that suffused the dance halls of the 1920s, as well as the hotter and more experimental jazz, marked by shifting time signatures, bluesier rhythms, and instrumental dissonance. Indeed, Ellington soon made it clear that his band performed both for dancing and for listening. Availing themselves of new recording technology, the emergence of national music charts, new media outlets such as *Variety*, and the radio airwaves, Mills and Ellington secured wider recognition. The band had a lengthy and spectacularly successful run at the Cotton Club before going out on tour, where they effectively desegregated a raft of theaters and clubs. Mills insisted that the band play only its own material, and Ellington's experimentation with long compositions enhanced his developing image as an artist apart from popular conventions, as a musical “genius.” By the mid-'30s, according to Cohen, “Ellington had become a serious and respected figure, selling out concerts all over the world, featuring on network radio and in national magazines and newspapers, all the while contradicting the precepts behind centuries of American racial discrimination.” Along with Armstrong, he was one of the few black artists to prosper during the Great Depression.

Ellington and Mills parted company amicably in 1939, and although Ellington found representation with the William Morris Agency, he now seemed less interested in the mass market of swing than in the artistic possibilities of the jazz form. He began his extended collaboration with the composer, arranger,

and pianist Billy Strayhorn (whose “Take the ‘A’ Train,” recorded in 1941, became the signature number for the Ellington orchestra) and in the early '40s entered a period of enormous creativity. Yet it was a time that also brought disappointment. Ellington's “revue-sical,” called *Jump for Joy*, which had an all-black cast and “was supposed to bury Uncle Tom,” ran for eleven weeks in Los Angeles in the summer of 1941, but with mixed critical reviews (contrasted with exuberant reactions among black audiences and the black press) it never made it to Broadway, as Ellington had hoped. Eighteen months later, at Ellington's first Carnegie Hall concert—with an audience that included Eleanor Roosevelt, Leopold Stokowski, Marian Anderson, and Langston Hughes—the orchestra premiered his longest work, the forty-five-minute *Black, Brown, and Beige*. It had been in composition for years, meant as a sweeping musical treatment of African American history from the sorrows of slavery and “Jim Crowism” to the world of Harlem, with a kaleidoscopic rendering of the cultural landscapes. The music, very much defying European modes, embraced African-inflected rhythmic, work songs and spirituals, Latin beats, and blues.

Cohen devotes an entire chapter to this work, and, by using the unpublished script that Ellington wrote to accompany it, he reveals the composer's vision of enslavement, the West Indian saga of emancipation (especially the Haitian Revolution), the role of American slaves in gaining their freedom, and the struggles that engulfed black people in the twentieth century. Ellington's vision shared much with the thinking of W.E.B. DuBois, and like DuBois he was well ahead of his time. The three sections of the work—*Black, Brown, Beige*—captured both chronological development and the social and cultural complexity that it always embraced. But reviewers were unsettled by *Black, Brown, and Beige*, and Ellington never performed it in full again, though he remained committed to what he called the “Negro idiom.”

The late '40s and early '50s proved to be trying times for Ellington, as they were for Armstrong. There was the collapse of the big band audience and the rise of bebop (not to mention rhythm and blues and rock and roll); there was a falling out with Strayhorn over artistic credit; and there was Ellington's refusal to sign an NAACP pledge not to perform before segregated audiences (though he generally avoided them), along with his intimation that blacks were not ready for integration.

Ellington later claimed that he had been misunderstood and strongly backed the fight against segregation. He clearly had much high ground on which to stand. Cohen writes of the many ways that he supported battles for civil rights during the 1950s and 1960s, as well as of his warm meeting with Martin Luther King Jr. in 1963. But Ellington did insist that breaking down the edifice of Jim Crow was a massive and costly undertaking, one that required almost full-time effort and significant financial resources: in short, a huge mobilization of black community power. It was a perspective on African Americans and race that did not fit neatly into an integrationist framework, and may have influenced Ellington's sense of the “unadulterated Negro melody” he tried to identify and convey.

III.

AT THE VERY MOMENT in the early '40s that Ellington was moving away from swing and the sweet jazz that audiences and dancers craved, a related rebellion was erupting in the after-hours clubs of Manhattan, especially at Minton's Playhouse, Clark Monroe's Uptown House, and Dan Wall's Chili Shack up in Harlem. Unlike Ellington or Armstrong, the rebels were not the early pioneers and band leaders: they were roughly two decades younger and, at best, they were sidemen who played for Ellington, Armstrong, Cab Calloway, Coleman Hawkins, and Benny Goodman. Like Ellington, they regarded themselves as artists and modernists looking to move beyond the current musical fashion and its commercial orientation (though they didn't speak of tapping into the “Negro soul”). They were searching for new sounds, rhythms, and syncopations, distinctive instrumentalities and improvisations. What they created came to be called “bebop,” and among its creators was Thelonious Monk.

One of the great strengths of Robin D. G. Kelley's extraordinary biography of Monk is his ability not merely to evoke the context of an important cultural moment, but also to provide a rich and dynamic historical setting. His book is not least an excellent social history, so that we come to know the streets and the neighborhoods and the hangouts, the ethnic and racial mixes, the sounds and rhythms that seemed to fill the air, while also feeling the cultural and political pulse of the surrounding world. Kelley reminds us of the important generational moment that the 1940s represented, the black assertiveness that had marked the New Deal era, the tension and unrest in

black New York, the modernist effervescence in classical music and painting, and the developing war against fascism in Europe and Asia.

Kelley has no interest in reiterating jazz's legendary origin stories. He presents Minton's and Monroe's as more than the founts of bebop; they were, more precisely, musical thoroughfares, bringing a variety of young musicians together to learn, experiment, and jam, lending a powerful sense of the collective to the transformation that was under way. Instead of validating the tales of ruthless "cutting" that emanated from the nascent beboppers, haughtily keeping lesser players at the margins, Kelley suggests a far more edifying atmosphere, as much patience and teaching as intense competition. And Monk comes forth as a generous, if brusque, teacher. "Man," he told the trombonist Ted Kelly after a particularly rough outing, "come by the house tomorrow, because you don't know what the hell you're doing."

Kelley's biography makes a special effort to dispel many of the myths that came to surround Monk—eccentric, elusive, mysterious, mad, brooding, reclusive—while at the same time helping us to understand how those myths devel-

oped. Whereas the lives of Armstrong and Ellington had similar arcs and cadences, with both achieving financial success and public renown, Monk's path, befitting his music and his generational cohort, was more jagged and halting, more challenging to follow and to comprehend, more likely to veer in unanticipated and destructive directions. Monk would become an international jazz star but would still fail to gain the recognition and rewards that he believed he deserved, or the medical aid that might have allowed him to weather the storms in his life.

Born in 1917 in Rocky Mount, North Carolina to a poor family whose forebears had been enslaved, Thelonious Monk was brought to New York City by his mother, Barbara, at the age of five, while his father, with serious health problems, remained behind and effectively out of his life's orbit. The Monks moved into the San Juan Hill section of Manhattan, the largest black community in the city before Harlem's heyday, heavily populated by migrants from the South and the Caribbean, as well as by black musicians. Barbara wanted her son to play violin and he wanted to play the trumpet, but the family had a player piano and it

carried the day. He had a keen musical ear and took early lessons in the classical mold, but by the time he was thirteen jazz was his first love. Neighborhood musicians became his new teachers and the Columbus Hill Community Center something of a second home: there he formed his first band and regularly played the Friday-night dances.

Monk attended the highly regarded Stuyvesant High School, largely owing to his musical abilities, but he dropped out at age sixteen, intent on pursuing a career in music. Before too long he was on tour with a Pentecostal group, and although there are few details of his experience, Kelley notes that Thomas Dorsey and Charles Tindley had just begun to transform black gospel and sacred music, and that the ecstatic expressions Monk witnessed likely influenced his later performance style. After two years on the road Monk tired of the peripatetic life and returned to New York, where he formed a quartet and had his first love affair. He also began to hang out at a club inside the Cecil Hotel in Harlem called Minton's Playhouse. In 1941, he became the house pianist. It was his first regular job.

Minton's proved to be an exceptionally fertile environment for Monk, though

ZONE BOOKS

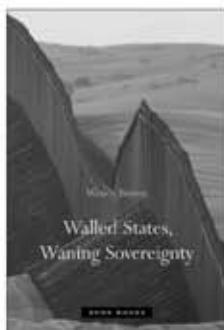


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Kelley cautions against claiming too much for the early years there. An assortment of important jazz musicians came through, some playing with the band and some jamming on Monday nights: Roy Eldridge, Lester Young, Ben Webster, Benny Carter, Teddy Wilson, and Coleman Hawkins, among others. Also turning up was the young trumpeter John Birks “Dizzy” Gillespie, born in South Carolina and already influenced by the Afro-Cuban sound, who spent hours working with Monk on the chords, voicings, and harmonics that could modernize swing. Although Kelley is clear that what was being played in Minton’s in 1941 could not yet be called bebop, he regards the club as “a kind of laboratory for new music.” It was also the site of Monk’s first recordings, and of important compositions such as “Epistrophy.”

As the “new music” gained energy during the 1940s, the spotlight focused chiefly on Gillespie and Charlie Parker, the remarkable alto saxophonist from Kansas City, who played with blistering speed and an almost surgical precision, a style that would epitomize bebop. Since they performed some of Monk’s music, notably “Round Midnight,” which quickly became a jazz standard, Monk was especially distressed at his apparent relegation to the sidelight. “I feel like I have contributed more to modern jazz than all of the other musicians combined,” he later reflected. “Dizzy and Bird . . . [are] supposed to be the founders of modern jazz when most of the time they only interpreted my ideas.” Parker, it should be said, regularly gave Monk credit as

a true “original,” but it was Parker and Gillespie who got the work.

Eventually the acknowledgments had an effect. In 1947, *Down Beat* magazine did a feature story on Monk. Soon thereafter Blue Note Records signed him, put together a marketing campaign (echoes of Irving Mills and Joe Glaser) that packaged him as the “High Priest of Bebop,” and constructed a lens through which the world, to the end of his life, would come to see him: mysterious, eccentric, unpredictable, childlike, exotic. “Nineteen forty-eight,” Kelley writes, “became the year Thelonious Monk was invented.” It was a moment of public recognition for the modernist impulse in the arts more generally, and it was easy for observers and critics to liken beboppers to their counterparts in painting and symphonic music. In the pages of *PM*, Ira Peck depicted bebop as a form of high art and spoke of its “analogies” with the “works of Picasso and Dalí.” “Be-bop is to jazz,” Eugene List argued, “as atonality is to classical music.” With his beret, his goatee, and his dark glasses, Monk became the emblematic image of jazz at its far reaches.

In truth, Monk was anything but the archetypal bebopper. Although he enjoyed being regarded as a progenitor of bebop, he preferred to think of what he did as “modern music.” His sound was distinctive, one of a kind, slower paced, self-consciously deliberate on the keyboard, uniquely dissonant. And while a growing number of black musicians, writers, and artists—Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, Leroy Jones, Romare Bearden—were drawn to and deeply in-

fluenced by Monk’s music, he did not sell many records. He never would.

The difficulties of earning a steady and decent living—worsened by arrests for possession of marijuana, which, for a time, cost him his all-important New York cabaret card—weighed heavily on Monk, especially once he married and had two children. Suffering from what would much later be diagnosed as bipolar disorder, he spiraled into intermittent depressions, all the more so as friends and colleagues in the jazz world (Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Elmo Hope, Bud Powell), as well as close relatives, succumbed at young ages to narcotics or illness or both. He would be hospitalized on several occasions, and treated with an assortment of drugs that may have worsened his condition. But he did continue to play, record, and tour, and in France in 1954 he met Baroness Nica de Koenigswarter, a Rothschild, who loved jazz, marveled at Monk’s talents, and, next to his family, became Monk’s most important supporter. (She also befriended Charlie Parker, who died in her New York hotel suite.) The baroness stepped in when Monk needed financial help, and her American home in nearby Weehawken, New Jersey became an important retreat.

Despite emotional ups and downs, tragic turns, and ongoing financial disappointments, Monk was keenly aware of the turbulent world around him, particularly the struggles of African-descended peoples at home and abroad. He participated in numerous benefits for civil rights and social justice causes, in-

Flying Things

Now the spell
has broken,
the bleeding and
coalescing begun,
each day

soft and hard,
cold and warm,
nurturing and distant,
as the cold rain
gives a ghostly aura,

wet-on-wet,
to everything,
moth, squirrel, bee,
fly, and bat providing
occasional reverberations

from the earth,
which soon will be
draped and piled
into abstraction,
while each snowfall—

like linen unfolded,
conjuring the domestic—
forces us further inward
into the fraught territories
of self and family,

instead of out into waves
at the beach or furrows
in the bronzing garden.
Fold one thousand
paper cranes on the kitchen table

and the spirits will cure you,
a friend once advised,
a thousand crane constructions
to complement, sustain,
and nurture me

when the multi-breasted
“good mother” is gone,
and the art of life
becomes, mostly,
the art of avoiding pain,

so the ceremonial
folding goes on,
each bird folded
and sewn to another,
beak to tail.

HENRI COLE

cluding “Jazz Sits In” sponsored by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). And he was embraced by black nationalists and other radicals, who saw him as something of a heroic figure for his daring brilliance and iconoclastic style. Indeed, in 1967 artists associated with the Organization of Black American Culture placed him on a “Wall of Respect” alongside Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, Stokely Carmichael, Billie Holiday, Muhammad Ali, John Coltrane, and W. E. B. DuBois. Even so, unlike Ellington, who spoke of the close relation of his artistic form and racial heritage, Monk was inclined to distinguish between the two. “My music is not a social comment on discrimination or poverty or the like,” he told an interviewer in 1959. “I would have written the same way even if I had not been a Negro.” More a “defense of artistry” than a “rejection of politics,” as Kelley observes of Monk’s remark, it nonetheless revealed a sense of tension in the “modern music” that Monk created, and set him apart from many of the era’s jazz musicians.

IV.

NINA SIMONE, who appeared with Monk on several occasions, was far more direct—in her music and her public persona—about her politics and her social identity. Her songs “Old Jim Crow,” “Go Limp,” and “Mississippi Goddam,” her appearances at civil rights benefits and Black Power rallies, her insistence on lecturing and provoking audiences (at times bordering on contempt for them) often caused controversy and made her a political lightning rod. “I feel my origins very deeply,” she told an interviewer in 1965. “My art is anchored in the culture of my people and . . . [whenever I sing] I want people to know who I am.”

In fact, Nina Simone was something of an invention. Born Eunice Waymon in Tryon, North Carolina in February 1933, she early turned her obvious musical talents toward classical piano. With financial help from two local white women (Northern transplants for whom her mother worked) and instruction from the British-born Muriel Mazzanovich, known to all as Miss Mazzy, Waymon eventually won a summer scholarship to Juilliard and set her sights on admission to the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, where her mother and younger siblings had moved in 1950. She was not accepted, and she was devastated by the news.

Some family members blamed the rejection on racism, but Waymon feared that she simply was not good enough to become a concert pianist. She found an instructor at Curtis to give her lessons

and took a job accompanying, and soon assisting, a local voice teacher; and through her students she found a summer job in Atlantic City playing piano in, of all places, a bar on Pacific Avenue. When asked by the owner how she wanted to be “billed,” and worrying about her mother’s likely view of the job, Waymon told him “Nina Simone.” She later explained that the name was cobbled together from a boyfriend’s nickname (he called her Niña) and the name of the French film star Simone Signoret.

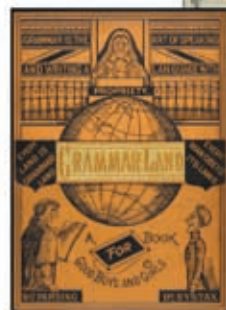
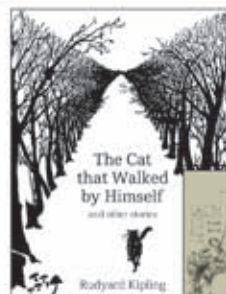
In her new and potentially intimidating environment, Simone did very well, showing range and flexibility. She was able to draw upon the gospel and blues music that undoubtedly infused the world of her youth, and when the bar owner told her that unless she sang she would be out of a job, she not only sang (working in the voice studio in Philadelphia may have given her the necessary confidence) but also seemed to enjoy it. Within a short time, Simone had an Atlantic City following. By the next summer she was a local celebrity, and one of the bar’s regulars introduced her to Billie Holiday’s recording of the George Gershwin song, “I Loves You, Porgy,” from *Porgy and Bess*. Simone worked up her own version and it quickly became the bar favorite, and eventually one of her hits.

Simone was now a long way from the classical concert stage, and, as Nadine Cohodas points out in her well-researched book, her sets had become a “merry-go-round of styles,” mixing folk songs, show tunes, and pop hits along with some of her own creations. But she parlayed her Atlantic City success into club dates in Philadelphia and Manhattan, a contract with Bethlehem Records, and a marriage (the first of two). Despite her eclecticism, she came to be regarded chiefly as a jazz artist. Bethlehem was known as a small jazz label, and Simone soon performed in a number of well-recognized jazz venues: the Village Vanguard in New York, the Playboy Jazz Festival in Chicago, and the Newport Jazz Festival, not to mention Town Hall concerts that included Horace Silver, Max Roach, and Sonny Stitt, in addition to Thelonious Monk.

Politics and racial identity had not, up to that point, been a part of the mix. Simone admitted to feeling politically disconnected and a bit embarrassed by it, especially since she had fallen in with black artists and intellectuals such as Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and Lorraine Hansberry, who were very much involved in the black struggle. “The Waymon way was to turn away from

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prejudice and to live your life the best you could," she reflected. Hansberry, with whom Simone was especially close, did the prodding; but it was the murders, in 1963, of Medgar Evers and the four black children in a Birmingham church bombing that, by Simone's reckoning, "lit the fuse." It took her an hour to write "Mississippi Goddam."

From then on, Simone's political self-consciousness became a central part of her musical and performative artistry. It was evident in where she sang, what she sang, and how she sang. "The most important thing these days," she told *Ebony* in 1968, "is to make certain that I make some statement on the stage about how we feel as a race." Not all of Simone's audiences appreciated her pedantry, impatience, and occasional rudeness. But for all the controversy, she had developed a following that was far larger and more devoted than her record sales might indicate.

Her voice did not have the octaval range of Louis Armstrong's trumpet. Her songs lacked the complexity of Duke Ellington's arrangements. Her phrasing and intonation were not as unusual or distinctive as Thelonious Monk's piano. But there was a depth, a timbre, and a poignancy to her singing, in the best of the jazz/blues tradition, that proved riveting and soul-wrenching to her listeners. "To hear her sing," one critic wrote, "is to be brought into abrasive contact with the black heart and to feel the power and beauty which for centuries have beat there. It is like a journey to a dark and uncharted nether region of the soul where hate has been mated with love."

Yet by the late 1960s, Simone was clearly suffering from some sort of personality disorder that compromised her ability to maintain important relationships and to perform at the level her fans expected. Her marriage to Andy Stroud, who had become her business manager, broke up. She was prone to chastise those around her and to dress down other musicians who, by her lights, had misbehaved. She became estranged from her daughter. And her efforts to "shake people up" by blending art and anger on the stage often failed to work as she might have wished. Complaining more and more about promoters and producers who did not pay her, she also had tax troubles. She lived on and off in Europe, and although her financial situation ultimately improved thanks to savvy legal help, her physical and emotional decline seemed impossible to arrest. Soon after her mother died in 2001 at the age of ninety-nine, Simone was diagnosed with terminal breast cancer.

COHODAS'S BOOK lacks the social depth and the historical perspective that can be found in the works of Cohen and especially Kelley. But, implicitly at least, her biography of Simone raises at least two issues that studies in jazz history such as these rarely take on. One is gender. Throughout the ages, the musical arts—as well as painting, sculpture, and literature—have generally recognized the predominant authority and creative contributions of men. They are the ones associated with innovation, distinction, brilliance, and "genius." Blues music is a bit unusual in this regard: from early on, women played an important role—the "classic" blues singers included Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Ethel Waters, and Memphis Minnie—not only in advancing the genre but also in translating what began as a largely rural and acoustic phenomenon into something for the ears of new urban listeners, South and North.

But jazz, in so many other ways a culturally progressive force, developed as an almost self-consciously male art form. From the instrumental and compositional virtuosity of Armstrong or Ellington to what Ted Gioia, in his terrific *The History of Jazz*, calls the "testosterone-infused sounds" of bebop and its legatees John Coltrane, "Sonny" Rollins, and Ornette Coleman, jazz and its history have celebrated the male pioneer and master, with his competitive chops, pushing at the boundaries of what was thought to be musically possible. Small wonder that Nina Simone could insist that "though I include jazz in what I do, I am not a jazz pianist at all. . . . I play jazz and blues, but they are not mine. The root is classical." It should not be surprising that, given their history of repression, subordination, and cultural belittlement, African Americans would be eager to identify and to encourage certain types of "genius" in a world in which "genius" was chiefly coded male—especially ones that defied the racial stereotypes that had long burdened them. This was one of Ellington's goals, even if it was quietly pursued. And there can be no denying the end result, in which the mostly male jazz icons are widely regarded as cultural giants in American life.

Yet in our tendency to commemorate the pantheon of individuals who appear to be the pathbreakers—and to prefer the instrumental over the vocal and the bandstand over the dance floor—we can easily forget, or construct as mere "background," the important sites of collective activity, where the gender balances would be very different, that gave rise

to the individual achievements themselves. Think of the work songs and field hollers of the slave and post-slave South, the church choirs and gospel music that made their way from South to North in the Great Migration, the juke joints and dance halls that gave the music special intensity. Kelley comes the closest to recognizing and capturing this dynamic, though a fuller appreciation may require something other than a biography.

The second, and related, issue is the audience, or what might be called the "jazz public." For the first few decades of its history, jazz went hand in glove with dance, and the dance halls, whether on Chicago's South Side or in New York's Harlem, were the main venues of jazz performance and development, in both arrangement and improvisation. As one might expect, the audiences were principally young and black, though whites came to frequent the halls as well, turning them into one of the few sites of interracial sociability in the United States. With the emergence of swing and the proliferation of white swing bands, the jazz public and its white component grew apace, though the music became less edgy. But with the rise of bebop and the collapse of swing, jazz made a significant transition: from big bands to small combos, from dance halls to clubs, from dancers to listeners, and from larger interracial and mixed-gender to smaller, and mostly white male, devotees.

The jazz scene of New York City was emblematic in this regard, shifting during the 1940s from black Harlem down to 52nd Street. By the early '50s, jazz record sales in the country had dwindled to about 1 percent of all records sold, and the public vitality for the music appeared to have moved to Europe, where a serious fan base had come into being. Popular audiences in the United States had turned in droves to rhythm and blues and rock and roll, with their driving beats and danceability.

Despite the many variants that would develop—cool jazz, neo-traditional jazz, soul jazz, free jazz—and the revitalizations and fusions of several sorts that have enlarged the interested public, the music would never quite recover from its postwar popular decline. The proliferation of jazz studies courses at institutions of higher education, as well as of historical documentaries and other related film representations, are both a measure of the music's artistic status and a sort of epitaph. Yet the creative energy that jazz has marshalled and expressed over the past century has not only been felt internationally but also continues to mediate

the encounters between musical genres across the globe. As Robin D. G. Kelley suggests elsewhere, “If we think of ‘jazz’ as improvised music created in and for its own time and place, a music that draws on the sounds and sensibilities of the moment,” its life is all around us.

Still, when Duke Ellington spoke of “endeavoring to establish unadulterated Negro melody portraying the American Negro,” he reminded us that jazz, like

other modernist artistic forms, grew out of the historical experiences of specific social groups—that in many ways the African diaspora set the vectors and rhythms for the emergence of the modern world. And when Louis Armstrong turned a stint in the Colored Waifs’ Home into the remarkable music of the Hot Five, he showed us that cultural innovation, more often than not, gushes from the bottom up. ♦

Ruth Franklin IMPACT MAN

FREEDOM

By Jonathan Franzen
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
562 pp., \$28)

A FEW YEARS AGO there appeared in *The New York Times* a profile of a Manhattan environmentalist who became known as No Impact Man. No Impact Man—his real name was Colin Beavan—had set himself the goal of radically reducing his family’s carbon footprint for a year: no paper products, no food that came from farther than a 250-mile radius of New York City, no fuel-consuming transportation. Rather than use the elevator, he climbed the steps to his Fifth Avenue apartment; and his wife bicycled to work, carrying her lunch in a Mason jar. No Impact Man made an exception, naturally, for the power required by his Internet service, for which he absolved himself by writing a blog chronicling the vicissitudes of his carbon-free year. Soon he had a book contract to show for his trouble, and a documentary film followed shortly thereafter—trees and the grid be damned.

I thought of No Impact Man more than once while reading Jonathan Franzen’s new novel, and not only because of the book’s obsession with containing the environmental damage done by our species. Franzen, too, in various writings over the last decade, has become fascinated by impact, although in his case the impact in question involves a literary ecology. In an essay that appeared in *Harper’s* nearly fifteen years ago, he famously bemoaned the decline of the novel as a vehicle for social commentary. Not since *Catch-22*, he wrote, had any “challenging novel . . . affected the culture anywhere near as deeply, just as no issue since the Vietnam War had galva-

nized so many alienated young Americans.” Gone were the days when novelists appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine and their works brought the news about pressing social concerns. Instead American writers faced the “cultural totalitarianism” of television and the generations of philistines it produced, and as a result their novels, no matter how “culturally engaged” they might be, no longer had the power to effect any kind of real impact on the culture.

With almost novelistic irony, Franzen’s career since 2001—when *The Corrections*, his third novel, was published to nearly universal acclaim—reads as an attempt to disprove his theory about the death of important realism by showing that it does not apply to himself. Serious novels no longer matter to our culture? Tell that to Oprah Winfrey, who chose his novel for her book club. (Franzen did tell it to her and was disinvited from her show, which he wore as a highbrow badge of honor.) The editors of *Time* put Franzen on their cover to celebrate the publication of *Freedom*, with the deadpan and portentous headline “Great American Novelist.” Swooning reviews of the new novel have appeared in *The New York Times* and almost everywhere else, and in its first day on sale the book ranked number one on Amazon. So is Franzen finally smiling? Will he now agree that literature still matters in American culture?

Perhaps not, because in another essay he revealed that he is fundamentally unsure about what purpose literature ought to serve, and thus about what sorts of novels he wants to write. (He has a persistent habit of looking for the *zeit* in his own *geist*.) In “Mr. Difficult,” nominally a paean to William Gaddis, Franzen outlined two possible models for the novel. According to the “Status model,” novels exist fundamentally as works of art: “the

people who manage to write them deserve extraordinary credit, and if the average reader rejects the work it’s because the average reader is a philistine; the value of any novel, even a mediocre one, exists independent of how many people are able to appreciate it.” (Franzen was responding to a reader of *The Corrections* who chastised him for using “fancy words” such as “diurnality” and “antipodes,” continuing: “Who is it you are writing for? It surely could not be the average person who just enjoys a good read.”) In the “Contract model,” by contrast, the novelist’s goal is to provide pleasure to the reader in a kind of social compact: “the deepest purpose of reading and writing fiction is to sustain a sense of connectedness, to resist existential loneliness; and so a novel deserves a reader’s attention only as long as the author sustains the reader’s trust.” Though Franzen admits the idea of being a Status novelist is “flattering to the writer’s sense of importance,” he declares himself a “Contract kind of person.” Better to be loved than to be admired, he says, ruing Gaddis’s descent into an angry postmodernism that alienated his readers: “If you crack a tooth on a hard word in a novel, you sue the author.”

Franzen’s continued questioning, combined with his insistence on dividing the world of literature into binary categories (his polemics are filled with dichotomies: connection versus solitude, high art versus mass culture, and so on), reveals a deeper uncertainty at the heart of his enterprise. He is never liberated from the anxiety of self-definition. If a social novel can no longer bring news, then what is it still good for? Is the purpose of literature primarily therapeutic or palliative—is it meant to cure us of our problems, or simply to ease our pain for a while? Is a novel permitted to assert its own aesthetic vision regardless of whether that vision might alarm or wound its readers, or ought it merely to promise enjoyment in return for the reader’s engagement? And who is he writing for, anyway—the highbrow critic who will not crack a tooth on “diurnality,” or the “average person who just enjoys a good read”? Rarely has a writer been both so ambitious and so ambivalent, and seemed to know so little about who he is. And so Franzen’s newest monument to American life stands on very shaky ground.

FREEDOM, like *The Corrections*, is a Way We Live Now novel, consummately of its moment. Neither of these books could have been written in precisely the same way at any other point in American history. As it happened,

The Corrections, which was set at the end of the 1990s and came out a week before September 11, inadvertently illustrated one of the perils in all writing that strives for perfect contemporaneity: if an unforeseeable event alters the social reality and the cultural mood, the novel turns into a fossil, instantly and irretrievably dated. Read in the weeks after September 11, when it seemed that all our assumptions about American complacency and impregnability had been shattered, *The Corrections* felt immediately like a time capsule. How Franzen must have subsequently cringed at his character Enid's comment that "disasters of this magnitude [the Depression] no longer seemed to befall the United States." And yet *The Corrections* sold around three million copies, perhaps because an escape to the pre-catastrophic past appeals most to readers who, in an hour of crisis, yearn for yesterday.

Freedom takes place over a period of about thirty years, but its primary focus is on the George W. Bush era. When it begins, Patty and Walter Berglund, college sweethearts, are among the first wave of urban pioneers putting the gentry back into gentrification, fixing up a house in a blighted area of St. Paul that they will soon populate with their two children. The short preamble offers an overview of their lives from the perspective of their neighbors, from the time they move in as a young couple to their departure around the time the children leave for college. Patty, a former college basketball star who once made "second-team all-American," is a mother and housewife in the newly popular liberal model: "tall, ponytailed, absurdly young, pushing a stroller past stripped cars and broken beer bottles and barfed-upon old snow.... Ahead of her, an afternoon of public radio, the *Silver Palate Cookbook*, cloth diapers, drywall compound, and latex paint; and then *Goodnight Moon*, then zinfandel." She bakes cookies for the neighbors on their birthdays and opens her house to their children. But Patty's baking and mothering cannot keep her home together: her son Joey, while still in high school, moves out to live down the street with his girlfriend Connie and her family, which happens to include the only Republican on the block. The strain that their child's defection places on the Berglunds' marriage is obvious to all. When they leave in the early 2000s for Washington, where Walter has a new job doing something vaguely ominous involving the coal industry, one of the neighbors remarks, "I don't think they've figured out yet how to live."

Patty and Walter's history, we soon learn, is spotted with hurts and betrayals of varying size and severity. "Mistakes were made," the infamous apology-without-responsibility catchphrase of the Bush years, is pressed into service as the title of Patty's autobiography, an interrupted sequence of flashback chapters embedded within the novel. Written, she explains, at the suggestion of her therapist, it revisits the sites of past traumas, the primary one being Patty's date rape, in high school, by one of her classmates. When she told her parents, they encouraged her not to press charges, because the boy's parents were major contributors to the campaign fund of her mother, a local politician. (Later, when Joey commits a crime with similar overtones, Walter will react in much the same way.) In college, still fragile from this experience, she falls into an obsessive friendship with a strange girl named Eliza, whom she will later call a "stalker." When Eliza starts to date Richard Katz, the lead singer of a punk band called the Traumatic, Patty attends a show and meets Walter, Richard's roommate and best friend. She is attracted to Richard's looks and charisma—"He's so big, it's like being rolled over by a neutron star... like being erased with a giant eraser," Eliza says—but she is simultaneously drawn to Walter's kindness and gentleness, as well as his vision of her as a better person than she believes herself to be. "The mistake she went on to make, the really big life mistake," she comments in her autobiography, "was to go along with Walter's version of her in spite of knowing that it wasn't right."

At first glance, *Freedom* appears to be a novel about Walter and Patty's long marriage, from the initial joy of their union to its disintegration into contempt and alienation. We get scenes such as this one, in which they have sex after a fight: "While the rain lashed and the sky flashed, he tried to fill her with self-worth and desire, tried to convey how much he needed her to be the person he could bury his cares in. It never quite worked, and yet, when they were done, there came a stretch of minutes in which they lay and held each other in the quiet majesty of long marriage, forgot themselves in shared sadness and forgiveness for everything they'd inflicted on each other, and rested." But in fact the glimpses we get of Patty and Walter together are discontinuous and incomplete. This is partly owing to the novel's structure: it flashes backward in Patty's "autobiography" and then forward again, alighting temporarily on other family members before moving on. For a novel about marriage,

this one shows us very little of its protagonists' partnership. We see Patty and Walter, intensely, at the beginning of their relationship; and we see them finally come apart. The paradoxical freedom of marriage—the freedom found in commitment to another person—is not the freedom explored here.

The dominant freedom in *Freedom* is, as Walter puts it in a moment of aggravation, "the freedom to fuck up your life." This plays out most literally for Patty, whose brief affair with Richard Katz brings about the destruction of her marriage. As Joey, still a young teenager, becomes more involved with Connie, Patty grows alcoholic and unmoored—she slashes the tires of Connie's mother's boyfriend in retribution for his unneighborly refusal to restrict his chainsaw-wielding renovations to the daylight hours. Richard, who has in the interim become a hipster rock star, rebukes her for her self-absorption, and Patty responds by becoming absorbed in him. When they are left alone together at the family lake house, Patty sleepwalks into Richard's bed one night and seduces him. (The name of Richard's band—for a proud realist, Franzen often has a tin ear—is, ridiculously, Walnut Surprise, and the sleepwalking scene is nearly as implausible.) Sex with Richard, it turns out, is "a real eye-opener.... She was henceforth done for, though it took some time to know this."

At this late date, in a book that purports to understand the entirety of the social world, the old Freudian retreat! What a disappointment. Is this really the best that the "Great American Novelist" can do with the question of what women want? There is something vaguely misogynist (though the tone is always too noble for any awareness of prejudice) in the novel's suggestion that Patty's emotional troubles—by this point she is drinking a bottle of wine or more a day—are primarily motivated by an unsatisfied desire to "properly [have] sex." This pitiful theme dominates not only these scenes with Richard, but also later episodes in the novel, when Walter comes back from a business trip to West Virginia during which his assistant, a lithe Indian woman in her twenties, has declared her love for him. (Why, exactly?) Returning home, Walter is suddenly "sick of it, sick of all the reasoning and understanding, and so he threw [Patty] on the floor and fucked her like a brute.... They were both smiling like crazy." What masculine rubbish! Afterward Patty is ready to give up on Richard and recommit herself to Walter. Richard, however, takes matters into

his own hands by leaving Patty's "autobiography," complete with all the details of her infidelity, for Walter to discover.

THE TOXIC WASTE of Patty and Walter's marriage finds a mechanical parallel in the eco-subplot, in which Walter sells out his principles with shocking ease by taking a job with a Texas billionaire who wants to establish a preserve in West Virginia for the cerulean warbler, an endangered species. The bird's natural habitat has been fragmented by runaway development, which Walter compares to the human "fragmentation" of the Internet age: "There's never any center, there's no communal agreement, there's just a trillion little bits of distracting noise.... All the real things, the authentic things, the honest things are dying off. Intellectually and culturally, we just bounce around like random billiard balls." The problem is that the creation of this sanctuary will require opening up fourteen thousand acres of land for a decidedly un-environmentally friendly strip-mining process called mountaintop removal—land on which a group of working-class Appalachians have been living for generations. The prospect of displacing these people, combined with his worry over the environmental impact of the mountaintop removal, throws Walter's liberal psyche into contortions. And the parallels with his own life are all too obvious, to us and to him. Walter, we learn, could feel the "toxicity" released by his fights with Patty "pooling in their marriage like the coal-sludge ponds in Appalachian valleys":

There was no way around the fact that when you dug up coal you also unearthed nasty chemicals like arsenic and cadmium that had been safely buried for millions of years. You could try dumping the poison back down into abandoned underground mines, but it had a way of seeping into the water table and ending up in drinking water. It really was a lot like the deep shit that got stirred up when a married couple fought: once certain things had been said, how could they ever be forgotten again?

It hardly seems an accident that Walter chooses to embrace population control as his pet cause, joining with his alluring assistant to start a movement called Free Space that will attempt to make not having children into the next fad among good liberals. The stretches of *Freedom* in which all this plays out are the most plodding and gratuitous in the novel. I was reminded of the eco-warriors' tactic of

asking us to imagine a future in which our children demand, "As the evidence began to demonstrate that the way we live might be unsustainable, what did you do?" And I heard myself sheepishly answer, "I read a novel by Jonathan Franzen."

If Patty uses her freedom to fuck up her life, and Walter uses his to fuck up the planet, Joey fucks up the Middle East. As a college student, he falls in with a group of Young Republicans and spends a summer interning in Washington for an outfit called RISEN, or Restore Iraqi Secular Enterprise Now, which aims to privatize Iraq's bread-baking industry. (There's that tin ear again. Satire is not one of Franzen's skills.) Though he is still enmeshed in an obsessive long-distance relationship with Connie, he uses his \$8,000-a-month salary to attract the attentions of his roommate's sister, a bored beauty named Jenna who toys with him in a game of bait-and-switch. Franzen is effective in describing Joey's frenetic capitalism, which finds its perfect counterpart in Jenna's wealth and materialism: her lips, the first time Joey kisses her, are as "valuable... as they had always looked to him." But Joey gets in over his head when he agrees to a contract to supply parts for heavy-duty trucks to the U.S.

Army for use in Iraq. Despite his partner's reassurances, the only parts available turn out to be low quality, and Joey balks at sending them. "You don't think I should be, like, morally worried about this? About selling total crap to the government?" he asks Connie, whose only concern is that he will be "unhappy" if he goes through with the deal. But a higher-up tells him to worry not about the quality of the parts but about "getting sued for nonfulfillment of contract.... This is not a perfect war in a perfect world." The homiletical message of all this is quite clear: all freedom requires compromise, in a way that could lead to our ruination.

IN AN ESSAY about sex books, Franzen once propounded a vision of the novel as lover: "Let's stay home tonight and have a great time; just because you're touched where you want to be touched, it doesn't mean you're cheap; before a book can change you, you have to love it." *Freedom* is undeniably great company under the covers: I burned through the book in two intense days holed up in my apartment. But the critics who have been celebrating this long-awaited return to the authoritative caresses of literary realism seem to have forgotten that a book (rather

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like a lover) can be highly enjoyable without having much substance. Franzen is better than anyone else at work today at delivering the kind of self-reflective portrait of contemporary life that we seem to crave—he gives us *us*, which is most of what we seem to want; and he has a gift for seductive undulations of plot and heart-tugging convulsions of character. But his prose is homely and lazy: “while the rain lashed and the sky flashed”; “fucked her like a brute”; “the deep shit that got stirred up”; “we just bounce around like random billiard balls”; and so on. This strikingly inert and unimaginative language may be owed to his all-consuming, almost ethnographic anxiety about getting the appearances right—but why should a novelist sound the way his characters sound? Worse, the stylelessness may be owed to the limitations of the vision at the heart of his book.

By the time *Freedom* is over, the reader feels less enlightened than manipulated. The manipulation has to do with the novel’s reliance on Patty’s “autobiography” to tell major chunks of the story from her perspective. Like many of the contrivances on which *Freedom* relies for the twists in its plot, this one is far from believable, and realism simply cannot afford so much implausibility. Patty, to put it gently, is no intellectual: from the start, the novel identifies her as a jock. In college, she is nonplussed when Walter asks her on a date to a play. Two decades later, when he suggests that she occupy her time with some kind of job, she chooses to become a receptionist at her gym. Yet we are meant to believe that she turns out a journal hundreds of pages long that chronicles the history of her marriage and her affair with Richard in smooth, if occasionally imperfect, prose—prose that is for the most part indistinguishable from the voice of the novel itself. This is the stuff of the MFA workshop.

The lack of distinction between Patty’s voice and the overall narrative presents a serious interpretive dilemma. In the final segment of Patty’s autobiography, which chronicles the six years after her separation from Walter, we learn that she, like so many of those who yearn for reinvention, has moved to New York, where she works as a teacher’s aide at a private school in Brooklyn. One day she runs into Richard on the street and they have a drink together. Patty laments how decisively Walter has cut her out of his life: after the sudden death of his assistant (by then his lover) in a car crash shortly after their affair began (again, really? a car crash?), he has isolated himself back at the lake house in Minnesota and re-

fuses to speak to her. “You know how to tell a story,” Richard tells her. “Why don’t you tell him a story?”

The book’s final chapter appears to be exactly that—Patty’s story of her reconciliation with Walter, who has been living in a grim bachelorhood, spending his evenings playing computer chess or watching porn (“because he could no longer read novels or listen to music or do anything else associated with feeling”) and waging war against the neighborhood cats in the hope of protecting the birds. He goes so far as to trap one particularly predatory tom and drop it off at a shelter, but afterward he is beset with a sadness that is worse than guilt: “The sense of loss and waste and sorrow: the feeling that he and [the cat] had in some way been married to each other, and that even a horrible marriage was less lonely than no marriage at all.” Aha! And so when Patty shows up on his doorstep, he lets her in; and within only a few sentences she is restored tidily to her former role, baking cookies and ingratiating herself with the neighbors. In the novel’s last line, we learn that after Patty brings Walter back to New York with her, the land on which the house stood is turned into a nature preserve, marked by “a small ceramic sign with a picture of the pretty young dark-skinned girl after whom the preserve is named.”

That is the line, I suppose, that has had some of the book’s reviewers (including this one) in tears. Who would not wish to be moved by this vision of reconciliation, by the suggestion that the bitterness of the past could be gutted and carted off like the innards of an old house, the toxic waste of the marriage magically redeemed as a nature sanctuary? But beware such tears. When we cry at a book or a film, it is often not because it is genuinely moving, in the sense that it has succeeded in shaking and even altering our previous understanding of life, but because its sentimentality is uncomfortably at odds with our own knowledge of what life is really like, and we are being offered a swift transit back to our sweet dreams. It is wish fulfillment, and also self-pity, that makes us weep. And so the ending must be in Patty’s voice—not her voice as an autobiographer, but a new voice, her voice as a novelist telling Walter a story about their lives. And when, precisely, did Patty become a novelist? Franzen’s ending is a trick, a bait-and-switch not unlike Jenna’s teasing of Joey, or the Bush-era dishonesties to which the novel so often and so dutifully alludes.

The lack of plausibility presented by Patty’s autobiography and by the numerous contrivances in this meandering narrative would be disturbing in any serious novel. But it is all the more striking in light of Franzen’s celebrated knack for accurately capturing the particulars of modern life. *Freedom* abounds in precisely targeted moments of verisimilitude: that reference to the *Silver Palate Cookbook*, a description of Richard’s college band (“Richard and two other Traumatica were screaming into their microphones, *I hate sunshine! I hate sunshine!*,” and Patty . . . brought her basketball skills to bear on making an immediate escape”), the stack of books by Elie Wiesel and Chaim Potok left on Joey’s bedside table by his roommate’s father after Joey confesses his partly Jewish background. These references are not exactly poetic, but they are at least sociologically apposite. If the task of art, and of realism in particular, is to hold up a mirror to contemporary life, then Franzen has fulfilled his responsibility. He has a talent for a certain kind of middlebrow mimesis.

But is this all we want from art? Is realism just a transcription of reality? Marveling at the various encomia to Franzen’s allegedly preternatural ability to show us what we actually look like, I was struck by the solipsism of the formulations—are we really our largest and most interesting subject?—and by the inherent narrowness of this vision of the aesthetic enterprise. In *The Mirror and the Lamp*, the great critic M. H. Abrams many years ago took issue with just such a shrunken ideal. He maintained that a fundamental aesthetic shift occurred at the start of the Romantic period, when writers and artists first began to envision art as not reflecting life so much as illuminating it with their own imaginations. The task of the novel, in such a view, is not to show us how we live but to help us figure out how to live—which happens to

be precisely the form of enlightenment that so many of the characters in *Freedom* are pleading for.

This is where Franzen’s novel founders. He is all mirror and no lamp. He substitutes the details for the big picture, a hyper-realistic portraiture for genuine psychological insight. (In its excessive, unedited interest in its characters, the novel itself recalls the creepiness of Eliza, the stalker whose binder stuffed with clippings about Patty is adduced by Richard as evidence of her unhealthy infatuation.) Instead of an epic, Franzen has created a soap opera.



In his obsession with “Contract” versus “Status”—his plainly stated preference for the “good read” over the “work of art”—he has chosen to forget that the greatest novels must always be both, offering mental illumination *and* sensual satisfaction, profundity *and* pleasure. His slick and hollow work is premised on a despair of ever honoring all the aspirations.

The commotion surrounding the publication of this pseudo-masterpiece reminds me of Orwell’s mordant observation that “to apply a decent standard to the ordinary run of novels is like weigh-

ing a flea on a spring-balance intended for elephants. On such a balance as that a flea would simply fail to register; you would have to start by constructing another balance which revealed the fact that there are big fleas and little fleas.” *Freedom* is a big flea, perhaps even a giant one. But if Franzen is the best we’ve got, he still isn’t good enough. His literary edifices have the look of greatness, but greatness eludes them. If my children someday ask, “What did you do in the culture wars, Mommy?” I hope I can come up with something better than “I read a novel by Jonathan Franzen.” ♦

Robert Alter

IN THE NAME OF THE MOTHER

TO THE END OF THE LAND

By David Grossman

Translated by Jessica Cohen

(Knopf, 577 pp., \$26.95)

THERE ARE THREE major Hebrew novels that record the anguished way-stations of the Zionist experience: S. Y. Agnon’s *Only Yesterday*, a masterpiece published in 1945, which deals with the early settlers in the first decade of the twentieth century, when he himself came to Palestine; S. Yizhar’s vast stream-of-consciousness novel *The Days of Ziklag*, which appeared in 1958, and focuses on the Israeli War of Independence; and David Grossman’s *To the End of the Land* (the original title in Hebrew was *A Woman Fleeing the News*), which came out two years ago and engages the condition of living in Israel in the era of terrorism and the occupation. *To the End of the Land* is Grossman’s most powerful novel—often emotionally painful in its power yet rich in a complex sense of life that goes beyond the terrible pain that it represents.

Since Grossman’s language is so supple and so resonant, let me say at once that Jessica Cohen has done a remarkable job in rendering it in English. She beautifully captures the evocativeness with which the Hebrew is used to describe landscapes, feelings, and bodily sensations; the vivid colloquial register that she creates for the extensive dialogues is exactly right; and she dem-

onstrates great resourcefulness in inventing English equivalents for the witty wordplay in the Hebrew. It is marginally annoying, precisely because her translation is so good, that every fifty pages or so her English momentarily goes off the rails. One encounters such oddities as a “shepherd with his herd” (instead of “flock”); a “power diffuses their bodies” (obviously, a mistake for “suffuses”); “tighten ranks” (instead of “close”); “pleasure gurgles into the corners of her eyes” (the Hebrew verb *mefakeh* means something like “seeps”); “pigeonholes” for the dug-out body shelters in the inner walls of a military stronghold. All these would have been eliminated if there still existed an institution of competent copy-editing in American publishing, but in any case they are infrequent blemishes in a translation that splendidly conveys the liveliness and subtlety of the original.

To the End of the Land treats several intertwined subjects. The most salient of these is the anxiety, or even dread, of life in Israel in the age of the intifadas, with a corresponding surge in the predominance of militaristic thinking. This predicament is depicted through the perspective of a mother, and the experience of motherhood and family takes up much of the book. The mother is Ora, who is part of an intimate three-way relationship so unconventional that it would be misleading to call it a triangle. Given the complications of the plot, some summary is necessary in order to explain how these topics play out in the novel.

The book begins with a long prologue set in the isolation ward of a hospital in the middle of the war in June 1967. Three sixteen-year-olds, Ora, Avram, and Ilan—the link between them is sublimi-

nally reinforced by the fact that in Hebrew their names all begin with the same letter, *aleph*—have been quarantined with a highly contagious disease. Cut off from the world, they pick up snatches of reports from the Hebrew-language transmission of Cairo radio that Egyptian troops have overwhelmed the country and that Israel no longer exists. One of the two boys sneaks into Ora’s room, afterward bringing the other with him. They both fall in love with her, and at the same time they begin to become fast friends with each other. Over the next four years Ora chooses Ilan as a romantic partner, but eventually she also becomes Avram’s passionate lover.

In the war in 1973, in which Ilan and Avram are stationed by the Suez Canal a short distance from each other, Avram is captured. The Egyptians realize that he is in intelligence, and so they subject him to brutal interrogation, hideously torturing him, beating him, raping him. After six weeks he is flown back to Israel as part of a prisoner exchange—he is a physical shambles, whispering in a terse sentence that he wishes he had died in Egypt. Ora and Ilan, who have married, have a baby boy named Adam, but both are obsessed with the plight of their mangled friend, and they take turns going down from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv in order to nurse him. Ora, after two years during which Ilan has for the time being left her, largely because he is haunted by Avram’s fate, goes on one of her visits to see Avram. When he tells her he has discovered that he is impotent, she deploys the sensual resourcefulness of an experienced woman to arouse him, and she conceives a child by him. This second son, Ofer, is raised by the now reconciled Jerusalem couple, Avram refusing to see him or even to hear about him.

All this constitutes the background of the woman’s flight from the news. The twenty-one-year-old Ofer, just discharged from his military service, volunteers to go back on a combat mission in the occupied territories. His mother, terrified that he will come to harm, superstitiously decides that if she is not home to receive the notification of her son’s death, the army’s grim messengers will never come to her door. She sets off on a hike through the Galilee on which Ofer was supposed to have accompanied her, stopping in Tel Aviv, where she virtually kidnaps Avram to come along with her instead of their son. Their trek through the northern part of the country then takes up the rest of the novel, though the often strenuous walking is combined with emotionally freighted talking that

Robert Alter’s *THE WISDOM BOOKS: JOB, PROVERBS, AND ECCLESIASTES: A TRANSLATION WITH COMMENTARY* has just been published by Norton.

reaches back into the past. Ora is determined, in part out of a fantasy that her narrative will somehow keep Ofer safe, to transmit to Avram—at first against his wishes—the concrete reality of his son's life from the womb to the present.

One of the most striking accomplishments of Grossman's novel is its success in representing a mother's experience. I can think of only a very few other novels by men that do such a persuasive job of entering into a woman's point of view. This success is strategically important in regard to the larger political themes of the book. Ora is by no means a post-Zionist or anti-Zionist—at one point she even expresses contempt for what she sees as the ostentatious self-righteousness of the leftist women protesting at checkpoints—but she is viscerally, obsessively a mother, and in this role she provides an acutely critical perspective on the macho culture of the Israeli military. Having lived for over two decades with three males, feeling an increasing sense of exclusion from their alien male solidarity, she perceives the army as a final stage in the harsh and irrevocable separation of son from mother: "She knew full well from her experience with Adam, who had been out of the army for three years, that they don't really come back. Not like they were before. And that boy he used to be had been lost to her forever the moment he was nationalized—lost to himself, too." Grossman displays an extraordinary ability to translate perceptions of this sort into physical sensations, as in the moment Ora embraces Ofer when he comes home from duty for a weekend: "Her fingers would recoil from the metal of the gun slung over his back and search for a demilitarized space on that back, a place that did not belong to the army, a place for her hand."

FROM EVERYTHING I have said so far, it may seem that this novel is exclusively devoted to the Israeli predicament, to life in what the Israelis call *ha-matzav*, "the Situation," and that as such it is chiefly of interest to readers elsewhere as a probing revelation of Israel's national quandary. There is some truth in this, but it is not the whole story. Ora's narrative also leads the book into the representation of a universal experience rarely explored by novelists. By and large, children in novels are used as props for the adults, like lapdogs in nineteenth-century British fiction, except for the cases where a child's viewpoint is adopted (as Grossman did brilliantly in the first section of *See Under: Love*). Parenthood in novels is usually peripheral to other

roles played by adults, unless the novel is concerned with a conflicted or psychologically fraught relationship between parent and child. The full spectrum of the experience of being a parent has not been a common object of novelistic attention, and that is what Grossman gives us compellingly through Ora's narrative.

Grossman has an uncanny ability to recall in total vividness all the meaningful moments in the life of a child from infancy on—the moments that most parents almost forget. Here, for example, is Ora's recollection of the newborn Ofer's hand: "with the deep crease around the wrist, and the bold red of the tiny hand itself, which until moments ago had been an internal organ and still looked like it. The hand slowly opened and revealed to Ora for the first time its conch-like, enigmatic palm—What have you brought me, my child, from the deep, dark universe?—with the thicket of lines drawn all over it." Then the hand, in an infant's reflex, closes around her finger, imparting the thrilling sensation that new parents know, and Ora thinks, "You are hereby betrothed to me with the wisdom of thousands of years and ancient epochs." Or here is Ofer at the age of one, swung around by his mother, lying on her back, on her upturned feet and arms in a game of airplane: "He laughed and his whole body quivered, and his fine halo of hair softly fell and rose as he sailed. The sunlight coming through the window shone through his ears, and they were orange and translucent."

Such passages are saved from sentimentality by the extraordinary concreteness with which they are imagined—the toddler's ears, orange and translucent in the sunlight, sticking out (as we learn in the next sentence) from his little head. The head, which becomes big-boned and powerful looking in the grown-up Ofer, is later an object of bemused contemplation for Ora: "She stands there wondering when he had time to develop bones like that and how this head could have passed through her body." That last clause is another small token of how fully the novelist has entered into a woman's imagination.

I have illustrated the persuasiveness of the mother's narrative that Ora spins out with three instances of wonder and elation. But the story that she tells Avram is protected from any slippage into sentimentality also by its range: it is not in the least limited to the raptures of parenthood. We are constantly reminded also of the tribulations of parenthood—that raising a child is a trying, messy, and sometimes troubling business, as

the child inevitably grows away from his mother, and enters into conspiratorial solidarity with his sibling, and develops tactics that baffle and worry his parents—in Adam's case, a period of months when he will speak only in rhyme, and then a set of obsessive gestures accompanying all his daily acts, from which only his brother can finally rescue him.

If parenthood holds deep satisfactions, it is also one of the most challenging tasks that any of us ever undertakes, and Ora is constantly aware of the steep challenges, and of the punishment she has absorbed in struggling to meet them. Here is a characteristic passage that the most ardent feminist writer could scarcely equal: "A skilled sponge. Most of what she'd done for twenty-five years was mop up everything that poured out of the three of them, each in his own way, everything they spat out constantly over the years into the family space, namely into her, because she herself, more than any of them, and more than the three of them together, *was* the family space." This self-perception also reflects the fact that her narrative of Ofer is also, necessarily, a narrative of the whole nuclear family, in which, over time, the dynamics shift back and forth. "A family is a perpetual occurrence," she proposes at one point, and the strength of the narrative that Grossman has devised for her lies partly in its ability to convey this sense of changing occurrence over twenty-five years of family life. Like parenthood, this is not a subject that novelists commonly treat.

THIS FAMILY STORY unfolds, of course, in a country unlike our own, where young men walk around in khaki uniforms with automatic weapons slung over their backs and where every time you take a seat at a café or on a bus you might nervously wonder whether you are about to be blown to smithereens. Yet Grossman's handling of child-rearing under the pressures of the Situation often makes one feel that it is, after all, like child-rearing everywhere. Ora remembers six-year-old Ofer asking her, as she is riding him to school on her bicycle, "Mommy, who's against us? ... Who hates us in the world?" This is the kind of question that children often ask, for which there is never a good answer. "And of course you want to keep his world innocent and free of hatred, and you tell him that those who are against us don't always hate us, and that we just have a long argument with some of the countries around us about all sorts of things."

In Israel, one must grant, such a question has definite geopolitical ramifi-

cations, and the little boy compels his mother to list for him all the countries that are directly hostile to Israel and then all the countries that are Arab or Muslim. Still, the tenor of the child's anxious question is a familiar one. We lamentably inhabit a world in which terrifying things happen from which we would like to shield our children. But we cannot simply exorcise crime and hatred and corruption and violence, and so we are sometimes obliged, like Ora, to tell our children comforting half-truths, knowing perfectly well that in the end they will grow up to live in full consciousness of the world's dangers and its ineradicable evils. In this way, the trials of motherhood that Ora experiences are both distinctively Israeli and also the trials of motherhood everywhere, writ large.

The story of Ofer that Ora tells Avram is intended, in the manic impulse of her maternal superstition, to ward off harm from her child. But she also means it to foster in Avram a sense of connection with his son that he has resisted for twenty-one years. Ofer's fate at the end is never spelled out—despite the wrenching fact that David Grossman's own son was killed in action in the last hours of the war in Lebanon, when a draft of the novel was almost finished—so we do not know if the charm works. What does work is the progressive engagement of Avram in his son's life. He has never really recovered from his shattering ordeal as a prisoner of war. He had been an exuberantly intellectual young man with grand ambitions to become a writer. After his return from captivity, he can neither write nor recover any sense of purpose. He supports himself by washing dishes in a restaurant, and his sole intimate relationship is with a quirky bohemian girlfriend much younger than himself who is intermittently present in his life.

Avram offers Ora a stark summary of himself late in the novel: "Nothing really hurts you and nothing really makes you happy. You live because you live. Because you happen not to be dead." Her perception of him, earlier in the book, aptly complements this dire statement of his sense of his life: "He had looked so distorted, she thought, like a boy playing with pieces of himself." Grossman is too good a novelist to suggest that Ora's story of Ofer "redeems" Avram from his existential bleakness, but after a while Avram does begin to manifest a degree of animation, a growing interest in Ofer and in Ora's whole family, that are very different from the uncommunicative self-imposed isolation in which we first see him in his wretched Tel Aviv apartment.

All the talking, then, in *To the End of the Land* proves to be remarkably resonant and, in regard to Avram, efficacious as well. But what about the walking? There is a paradox at the heart of the novel. By going on the hike and dragging along Avram, Ora wants to insulate herself from Israel and everything going on in it: the military action in the Occupied Territories, the country's addiction to the hourly news reports, the endless noisy discussions of national politics. Avram, for his part, has long since withdrawn from any sense of connection with the collective realm, hunkered down in his meager living-because-he-lives, befuddled by a steady dose of painkillers and sleeping pills. Yet their trek through the woods and the fields of northern Israel is a long encounter with the landscape of the country, rendered in loving detail by Grossman, and it confirms a sense of intimate attachment to it. This intimacy is reinforced by their feeling that they are virtually alone in the natural landscape, a feeling interrupted only in two episodes in which they encounter two very different, and bizarre, hikers.

Grossman finely renders the natural world in which they are immersed through the prism of their perceptions and their states of being:

Daylight burgeons as they lie on the edge of a field, bright shades of green unfurl as far as the eye can see, and they wake from a nap, still blanketed with a gossamer of dreams. They are the only two people in the world, there is no one else, and the earth steams with a primeval scent, and the air hums with the rustle of tiny creatures, and the mantle of dawn still hangs overhead, lucent and dewy, and their eyes light up with little smiles of not-yet-fear and not-yet-themselves.

The passage incorporates a delicate reminiscence of the Garden in Genesis 2, where a moistness wells up from the earth (and the Hebrew for "primeval scent" idiomatically uses the term *bereshit*, which is the very first word of Genesis). But even in this moment of euphoric awakening in nature, we are not allowed to forget the terrors with which both characters live: they sense freshness and renewal in part because they are not fully awake, and thus still in a state of "not-yet-fear and not-yet-themselves."

The immersion in nature, understandably, contributes to a gradual awakening of desire in these two people who have not been lovers for more than two decades. Several days into their hike,

Avram suddenly asks Ora, "Do you think we'll ever sleep together?" He then embraces her.

He presses her against his body and she feels his force. She thinks again of how much good this journey is doing him, and her.

They walk on, at first hand in hand, then they let go. Threads of new awkwardness stretch out between them, and nature itself winks behind their backs and plays nasty tricks on them, scattering yellow clods of asters and groundsel, blanketing purple clover and pink flax, erecting stalks of huge—but smelly—purple arum flowers, sprinkling red buttercups, and hanging baby oranges and lemons on the trees around them.

"Very arousing," Ora says. "This walk, and the air. Isn't it? Don't you feel it?"

He laughs, embarrassed, and Ora—even her eyebrows suddenly feel warm.

In such passages, Grossman maintains a nice balance between a lyrical evocation of the presence of nature and the mixed emotional condition of the characters that even in these moments is by no means an undiluted lyrical state. The emergence of desire in the natural setting is accompanied by awkwardness and embarrassment. The aphrodisiac magic of nature is perceived a little ruefully by the characters as playing nasty tricks on them. If those huge stalks of arum flowers might tempt a reader to imagine a phallic image in the manner of D.H. Lawrence, we are also pointedly informed that they are rancid. When Ora calls the walk and the air "very arousing," she is expressing something she actually feels in both of them, but the remark is also a little playful, perhaps even ironic. The sensation of warmth extending all the way up to her eyebrows—Grossman is especially good at imagining physiological correlatives to feelings—is a mingling of arousal with embarrassment.

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The experience of nature on this long hike through the Galilee, in a way that is related to the representation of motherhood, never slips into cheap feeling or into the easy exploitation of nature as a spiritual prop, because the novelist never forgets that the two characters have been bruised and branded by decades of living in an impossibly difficult place, and they carry with them their own dread, their own somber musings on life, for which nature, however stirring or enthralling, can offer no sure antidote:

The air bustles and hums. Flies, bees, gnats, grasshoppers, butterflies, and beetles hover and crawl and leap from the foliage. There is so much life inside every particle of the world, Ora thinks, and this profusion suddenly seems threatening, because why should the abundant, wasteful world care if the life of one fly, or one leaf, or one person, were to end at this very moment? The sorrow of it makes her start talking.

The natural world is the scene of pulsating life and stirring desire, but it also leads Ora to reflect on the paltry place of humanity in the vast scheme of earthly things, and on the fragility and the transience of any living creature (including, of course, her beloved son). “The sorrow of it makes her start talking”: this is a kind of motto for Ora’s enterprise as the narrator of her son’s life. It is also a clue to Grossman’s impetus in writing this novel, even before the contours of the book were retroactively made still darker by his son’s death.

To the End of the Land is an emotionally trying experience to read—one Israeli friend told me she repeatedly found her eyes welling with tears as she read. It indelibly etches the fears of those who live in the unending Situation, fears that will not go away. Yet it is not a bleak novel. It provides a persuasive intimation of some possibility of renewal after great devastation. It makes us feel love—a mother’s love for her children, a woman’s love for two men—as a force that, though it cannot offer protection from the violence of history, can sustain a person in living. And the focusing of the story through a mother’s consciousness and memories anchors everything in a strong sense of the quotidian, making it all imaginatively accessible.

Two kitchen scenes, one early in the novel and one near the end, are quintessential embodiments of this strength. In the first, Ora, after having taken Ofer, in a car driven by her Arab driver (a serious mistake, she soon realizes) to his

military assembly point, stands peeling a potato, lost in troubled thought about soldiers and armored vehicles and weapons, “the dark, calculated, formal course of the larger system.” Distraught by these somber musings, she lets the potato drop from her hand. It rolls off the counter and into a space on the floor between the refrigerator and the wall, “where it shines with a pale glow as she leans on the table with both hands and stares at it.” In the later scene she is chopping salad (Israelis like diced vegetables) and begins to hack violently as she angrily thinks of all the political leaders and combatants—first Arab, then Israeli—who have perpetuated and sustained this incessant condition of mutual mayhem. Her attitude toward the lot of them sounds like the reflex of an irritated housewife: “Did they really do everything they could so she could get five minutes of peace and quiet around here? All those people who razed her life, who keep nationalizing another one of her

children every second.” If the first of these scenes expresses a moment of despair, the second reflects a stubborn inner resistance. It is important that both take place in the kitchen: in the face of constant warfare, the mother, after all, has to continue providing for her family, nurturing it with meals and with love, however relegated she may be by culture and politics, as she says, to the sad role of a sponge.

To the End of the Land is the definitive novel of the present Israeli condition, but it also powerfully addresses feelings and fears and relationships that should be familiar to readers everywhere. The magical realist Grossman of *See Under: Love* has evolved over the years into a masterful realist concerned with psychological nuance and the complexities and ambiguities of personal relations. This is his finest achievement to date, and, in my own experience as a reader, one of the best novels that has appeared in any language over the past decade. ♦

Diane Ravitch

RESEGREGATION

IN BROWN’S WAKE:
LEGACIES OF AMERICA’S
EDUCATIONAL LANDMARK

By Martha Minow
(Oxford University Press,
304 pp., \$24.95)

MARTHA MINOW was born in 1954, the same year that the Supreme Court issued its historic decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, and, she tells us, has been trying to understand the implications of that decision “since I can remember.” She is well-qualified for the task of interpreting the legacy of that momentous decision. She clerked for Thurgood Marshall at the Supreme Court, taught at Harvard Law School (where one of her students was Barack Obama), and was short-listed for the Supreme Court seat that eventually went to Elena Kagan, her predecessor as dean of Harvard Law School.

Being a bit older than Minow, in 1954 I was attending a segregated high school in Houston, where I saw the effects of segregation in every aspect of life. Public buses were segregated. Drinking fountains in public places, even the supermarket, were labeled “white” and “colored.” Public and private accommo-

dations were rigidly segregated by law and custom. When black people approached a house owned by whites, they always knocked at the back door, never at the front door. Racial deference was expected and customary.

Under pressure from the courts and the federal government, the school system eventually desegregated. The city changed, too, in profound ways. Every kind of statutory racial segregation disappeared. Houston elected a black mayor. Over time, the *Brown* decision transformed almost everything invidious in Houston’s culture by striking down the power of the state to mandate racial barriers. But white families abandoned the public schools, which became predominantly non-white. So the schools once again were segregated—not by law, but owing to residential patterns and the voluntary decisions of individuals.

American society as a whole was also dramatically transformed by *Brown*. It is almost impossible to imagine the election of a black president in 2008 without that decision, which opened doors on campus, in the workplace, in politics, and in the popular culture. And yet,

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as in Houston, there is a curious conundrum. The *Brown* decision was about the public schools, but it seems to have had a large impact upon every aspect of American life except the public schools. Racial isolation in the schools has intensified in the past generation, as the federal courts abandoned metropolitan desegregation orders, stepped away from imposing remedies on school districts, and even rebuked districts that pursued voluntary integration plans. Almost every large urban district is now majority black and Hispanic, while many smaller communities are mainly white.

Fifty-six years after *Brown*, its chronicler must not only recount the story of how civil rights groups won their day in court, but must also try to disentangle the complicated meaning of the decision for our own time. Minow dutifully describes the way *Brown* affected debates about religion and gender, and changed the legal status of people with disabilities and students who were English-language learners and anyone who had suffered discrimination or unfairness because of his or her race, ethnic origin, or gender. Its legal foundation has animated even supporters of gay marriage, who appeal to the same fundamental principles of equality before the law that the *Brown* decision reaffirmed.

This should be an enthralling story, but Minow's book is not easy reading. Many chapters read like law review articles, with a citation attached to almost every sentence. Minow consulted experts of varying views and recapitulates different sides of every issue as she takes the reader through the reasoning of proponents and opponents. The reader occasionally struggles to find a coherent narrative in the thicket of argumentation about the evolution of cases and issues.

Inevitably, of course, Minow's discussion of *Brown* concentrates on what it means for the nation's public schools. In parsing its meaning for students today, she cites these passages from the decision and in them locates its central ideas:

1. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right that must be made available to all on equal terms.
2. To separate [black children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community.

And:

3. We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.

In 1954, those statements were clear and unambiguous. State-imposed racial segregation had to end. Districts and states where segregation was the law fought mightily to avoid complying, but eventually their resistance was broken by the consistent and vigorous actions of the federal courts, abetted by passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, along with the enforcement activities of the Johnson administration. Since the judicial, legislative, and executive branches acted in concert to correct a historic wrong, the nation's historic pattern of state-sanctioned racial segregation was at last abolished.

But what did the decision mean for the nation's public schools? Removing racial barriers did not change much, because most blacks and whites tended to remain in racially separate schools. When the federal courts required Southern districts to abandon racial segregation, Southern officials offered their students freedom of choice, saying that they were willing to "desegregate" but not to "integrate." Under freedom-of-choice plans, most black and white students continued to attend racially identifiable schools, not only because it was customary but also because of the intimidation of blacks. In response, the courts became more assertive and demanded statistical mixing of the races, not just superficial compliance.

The era in which the three branches collaborated to enforce the *Brown* decision, to initiate preschool programs, to reduce class sizes, and to invest in children's nutrition was also an era that narrowed the racial achievement gaps. A recent report from ETS called "The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped" tells us that the achievement gap between the races narrowed from the early 1970s to the late 1980s more than at any other time, a likely consequence of assertive governmental action to address the demands of the *Brown* decision.

MINOW'S BOOK does not compete with and cannot replace Richard Kluger's *Simple Justice*, which appeared in 1976, a rich and powerful history of the *Brown* decision. Minow approaches the subject as a legal scholar, displaying a brilliant command of case law. Her goal is not to retell the history, but to show the broad and con-

tinuing impact of the decision on many different spheres, particularly in establishing rights for various categories of students.

If the intent of the *Brown* decision was clear in 1954—to abolish state-imposed racial segregation—its meaning today is a source of ongoing litigation and controversy. As Minow documents, the decision unquestionably improved the educational opportunities of students with disabilities, who in the past had often been excluded from regular schools or segregated into separate institutions. As a result of a generation of advocacy on their behalf, federal laws and court orders require the mainstreaming and the inclusion of students with disabilities. Yet complexities abound, as schools continue to contend with difficult decisions about how to provide appropriate services and under what circumstances students should not be mainstreamed. At the same time, school districts have borne a heavy financial burden as a result of the federal government's persistent failure to fund the special education services that it mandates.

Similarly, Minow shows how the *Brown* decision encouraged litigation on behalf of gender equality. The Civil Rights Act forbade discrimination based on sex, followed in 1972 by legislation that included Title IX, which required that institutions receiving federal funding must equalize spending on programs for males and females. But abstract principles of fairness led advocates to different conclusions. Some sought to eliminate all gender distinctions, including single-sex institutions; but others insisted that enrollment in single-sex schools was voluntary and that such schools, unlike racially segregated schools, did not stigmatize students. Here *Brown* offers little guidance, because the courts have ruled against boys-only schools but not against girls-only schools. And at present, as more districts open single-sex schools, both boys' schools and girls' schools seem to be acceptable to the courts so long as they offer "separate but equal" facilities and resources.

Minow's guidance on some current issues is surprising. Looking for the legacy of the *Brown* decision, she endorses school choice, despite its segregating effects. It is a peculiar conclusion, because Minow recognizes full well that choice was the preferred strategy of those who sought to evade the intent of *Brown*, and she recognizes that contemporary choice strategists are based in conservative think tanks and funded by conservative foundations. And yet she believes

that school choice has somehow evolved into a strategy “endorsed by civil rights advocates, business leaders, and school reformers.” She is even persuaded that special-identity schools (such as schools based on ethnicity, language, or cultural heritage) may facilitate self-segregation yet also “promote integration across lines such as race, class, gender, immigrant status, language, and disability.” How or why this will happen is not clear.

Minow acknowledges that empirical evidence about the efficacy of choice is “limited and unreliable, given that studies are usually funded by politicized sources,” yet she believes that choice has unleashed school innovation and that parental choice itself will promote “greater family involvement, a strong factor in student achievement.” She seems persuaded by the choice movement’s efforts to frame its program as an evolutionary stage following the civil rights struggles of the twentieth century, the legatee of the *Brown* decision. Minow admits that “the actual effects of vouchers, charters, and other school choice efforts on student achievement are complex, unclear, and disputed.” Despite consistent evidence that charter schools and other schools of choice are often highly segregated, she contends that government officials might impose regulations to make them pluralistic. Vouchers and charter schools, she hopes, may advance integration and inclusion. She concludes that charter schools and parochial schools might even be “the heirs of the original common schools.”

Minow reaches her conclusions without referring to important contrary evidence. As she points out, the evidence on vouchers and charters is inconclusive, but she fails to mention some major studies that were available before she finished her book. For example, a national evaluation of charters by the Stanford economist Margaret Raymond in 2009 found that only 17 percent of charter schools outperformed matched public schools, while 46 percent produced gains that were no different, and 37 percent were worse. The study was funded largely by conservative foundations, so its findings run counter to what one might expect. Nor did Minow refer to results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the federal test administered in every state and considered the gold standard of testing. Charters have been

compared by NAEP to regular public schools since 2003, and have never outperformed them, whether one looks at scores of black students, Hispanic students, low-income students, or urban students. Behind the averages, which are none too promising, is this reality: some charter schools are excellent, some are abysmal, and most are somewhere in between. On the whole, students enrolled in charters do not outscore students in regular public schools on federal reading and math tests.

Moreover, charters are hardly models of integration and inclusion. Numerous studies have shown that they enroll disproportionately small numbers of students who are non-English-speaking and who have disabilities. There is also research, such as that by Tom Loveless and Katharyn Field of Brookings, showing that charters may promote racial segregation, since parents tend to choose schools with a racial profile matching their own. According to the Civil Rights Project at UCLA, the rapid growth of charter schools is expanding a sector that is even more segregated than the regular public schools. Gary Orfield, who directs the Project, remarked that “the charter movement has flourished in a period of retreat on civil rights.”

MINOW MIGHT HAVE also tempered her enthusiasm for choice had she looked more closely at the current status of academic achievement in Milwaukee and Cleveland, two of the cities where choice programs—both vouchers and charters—have been in effect the longest. For years, choice promoters claimed that competition would cause the public schools to get better, that it would act as a rising tide

that lifts all boats. But this did not happen. Vouchers started in Milwaukee in 1990, with state legislative approval and support from local black leaders; and the program took off in 1998, after the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled it constitutional. Today about twenty thousand students attend more than one hundred non-public voucher schools and another sixteen to seventeen thousand are enrolled in charter schools. Enrollment in public schools steadily declined after 1998 to about eighty-two thousand. The latest evaluations concluded that students in voucher schools make no greater gains than those in public schools. Black students in public schools (including those in charter schools) have NAEP scores that are below those of black students in Mississippi and Alabama. There was no rising tide in Milwaukee.

Cleveland has an equally dismal situation. Its voucher program was established in 1995, and scholars continue to debate whether students in the voucher schools have or have not made academic gains. But one thing is clear: the competition with schools of choice has not led to any improvement in the public schools. The Cleveland schools have taken the national tests since 2003, and they continue to be one of the nation’s lowest-performing urban districts.

A big problem with vouchers, as Minow notes, is that they are deeply unpopular. Academics debate their efficacy, and which group or subgroup benefits most by going to a non-public school, but whenever the issue is put to a vote, the idea of giving public money to sectarian schools is overwhelmingly defeated. Their supporters blame the teachers’ unions for defending public education, but even well-funded voucher campaigns have

lost by large margins. The public seems to want to maintain a public school system.

Charters are a different issue. When asked by pollsters, most people do not understand what they are or how they function. Unlike vouchers, charters have never been put to a popular vote; instead they have advanced through state legislatures, where the charter movement’s ability to muster campaign contributions (dwarfing those of teachers’ unions) has made a significant difference. Charters, like all forms of school choice, have been a favorite policy of Republicans for many years. The triangulating President Clinton endorsed them, too. Now char-

Orange Hole

The horses were so beautiful but the people ugly. Why is that? Both seemed perfectly alive. Both seemed to want to do what was asked of them as bullets snapped hitting branches and rocks and a blast wave blew everything down. I crouched against a boulder looking for safety, returning fire, everything in dreamy slow motion, orange smoke drifting out of the misty hole, introducing the idea of beauty as a salve and of aesthetics making something difficult accessible. Alone in that box of crisscrossing lead—my ears ringing, my skin pouring sweat—I missed you. But it was a rather pleasant feeling being waited for. God must be happy, I thought.

HENRI COLE

ters have the energetic support of President Obama, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, business leaders, and major foundations, all of whom are convinced that private management will produce better outcomes than regular public schools. Charters enjoy the tremendous financial clout of the hedge-fund managers clustered around Democrats for Education Reform. This strange-bedfellows alliance of market-minded Democrats and Republicans has turned charters into the hottest “reform” idea of the moment, even though the quality of the schools varies dramatically.

There are now at least five thousand charter schools, enrolling 1.5 million students. Under pressure from the Obama administration, most states have pledged to create many more. Although the name “charter” does not represent any particular educational program or philosophy, the elixir of private management is supposed to be the cure that will transform the nation’s poorest neighborhoods and lift up its lowest-performing students. But what typically happens is that charters open in poor neighborhoods, hold a lottery, attract the most motivated families (who know enough to enter a lottery), and then have the freedom to remove students who are allegedly not a good fit. That leaves the regular public schools with a disproportionate share of the students who are most challenging to educate.

The present turn to the free market and deregulation represents a sense of hopelessness about our society’s capacity to provide educational opportunity to poor and minority children, especially those who live in racially isolated neighborhoods. The test scores in cities such as Detroit, Cleveland, and Chicago are persistently low. Something must be done. We are a can-do society. If government cannot do the job, then why not turn “those kids” over to corporations and entrepreneurs who can make their own rules, eliminate those troublesome teachers’ unions, hire teachers who will work a sixty-hour week, and establish stern discipline?

Unfortunately, education is a slow process, and not amenable to quick fixes. Children learn one day at a time. The results of schooling are influenced by the social and economic conditions of the families who send their children to school and the society in which they live. In all the talk about school reform these days, it has become reflexive to discount the significance of poverty and race. Our reformers tell us that any such references are just excuses. They want “no excuses” schools, where every student is prepared

to go to a four-year college. We all want that. But it turns out to be a very elusive goal, because poverty and racial isolation are heavy burdens for children to bear.

If the problems of urban education were amenable to the current reform ideas, we would certainly look for answers to Chicago, where Arne Duncan was superintendent for seven years, or to New York City, where Joel Klein took charge in 2002. But according to a study in 2009, most of Chicago’s students drop out or fail to meet state standards. And in New York City, which had boasted of historic test-score gains since 2003, the gains shrank this past summer when a new state commissioner recalibrated the scores, admitting that those in previous years had been inflated.

IT COULD NOT have been the intent of the Warren Court in 1954 to place full responsibility on the nation’s schools to undo generations of racial discrimination and subjugation. Yet here we are in 2010, castigating the schools, blaming teachers, firing school staffs, and closing schools, because the achievement gap persists between children of different races. This allows us to forget what used to be referred to as the “root causes” of low academic performance: poverty, racial isolation, and all the social ills associated with economic insecurity, poor nutrition, and inadequate living conditions.

Last year the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science published a retrospective on the famous Moynihan report of 1965 called “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.” Moynihan was bitterly denounced for calling attention to the issue of out-of-wedlock births, and he was accused of “blaming the victim.” At the time, the black illegitimacy rate was 25 percent; now it is nearly 70 percent. Unemployment rates among black men are higher now than when Moynihan wrote his report. Incarceration rates are astonishingly high: in the Annals’ collection of essays, the sociologists Bruce Western and Christopher Wildeman write that “by the early 2000s, more than a third of young black noncollege men were incarcerated. Among black men younger than forty, there were nearly twice as many prison records as bachelor’s degrees.” Moynihan’s report, writes Western, marked a fork in the road. Moynihan called for “increased social investment to avert the problems of crime and poverty,” but America decided instead to build more prisons to contain social disorder. Incarceration rates in the United States

are far greater than in any European nation; blacks are eight times more likely to be incarcerated than whites.

What a tangle of social pathology developed as cities lost industries and jobs, as the middle class took flight, as crime and violence increased, and as the prospects for a decent life evaporated for those left behind. Nathan Glazer observed recently in *The American Interest* that we as a society seem to be unable to confront the problems of race and poverty. “There was a time not so long ago,” he said, “when we had trouble having a dispassionate, constructive discussion of these matters in public; now we seem unable to have any discussion at all.”

Now, instead of talking about rebuilding our cities, creating jobs for unskilled workers, retraining those whose jobs were lost to globalization, and reducing poverty, we blame the teachers and the schools for the conditions that limit their students’ lives and aspirations. Charter schools and vouchers provide an escape hatch for some students, but they are no replacement for a sturdy and reliable public school system. No high-performing school system in the world achieved its eminence by privatizing its public school system.

Our schools need to be improved. They need better-prepared teachers, better principals, better instruction, better curricula, better assessment, and more resources for schools that enroll students who are poor, disabled, homeless, and/or do not speak English. Yet if we want to improve the education of our children, we must look beyond the walls of the schools. According to Gary Orfield, who has been railing against segregation for years, black and Hispanic students are more segregated today than they have been at any time in the past four decades. About 40 percent of these students attend “intensely segregated” schools, where they seldom interact with white or Asian students. The typical black or Hispanic student, he says, attends a school in which nearly 60 percent of his or her classmates are poor.

The *Brown* decision wisely and bravely struck down state-imposed racial segregation. Martha Minow capably describes how that decision changed the lives of millions of people. What can it tell us today about the intense racial isolation and poverty that bind the lives of so many young Americans? Perhaps the lesson for us today is to look to that period in the late 1960s when the three branches of government worked together to design and to implement nothing less than a vision of a better society. ♦

The Higher Spleen

I HAVE A FRIEND who loves me, or so he recently told the *Daily News*; and I love him, too. We were incandescent young men at Columbia together, and he is now senior vice president for marketing and publicity at Farrar, Straus and Giroux, one of the honorable remnants of what used to be known as publishing. Insofar as my friend toils to keep his indispensable firm alive against the sick desire of a technologically intoxicated and economically panicked society to see its highbrow institutions hobbled or dead, he is a force for cultural good, a figure in the resistance. But I am not sure that he thinks the same of me. When a reporter with nothing better to do unearthed the shattering fact that I was about to publish in these pages an acidly critical review of *Freedom*, my friend, who is Jonathan Franzen's publisher, conceded to her that "everyone's entitled to his opinion," and proceeded to explain that I "specializ[e] in drawing attention to [my] pages through consistently negative reviews," and so Ruth Franklin's demurral about *Freedom* may be dismissed as "business as usual." I dislike the suggestion that the stringencies in my pages are motivated by considerations of marketing—that is my friend's line of work, not mine—but otherwise he is right. These pages are more stringent than not. They are not always negative, but they are often negative. You see, I pride myself on this negativism. I would like my friend to understand why.

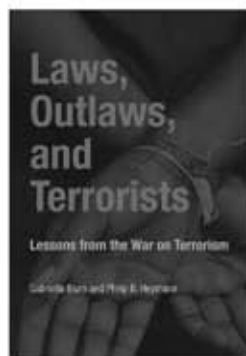
I WAS NOT AWARE that it is a heresy to hold that *Freedom* is not a masterpiece. There is something churlish about my friend's insistence upon critical unanimity. Franzen's book, after all, is fantastically popular. It is commercially immune from literary criticism. I am pleased that Franzen's profits will accrue to a company that may be counted upon to apply them to the production of serious books by serious writers that will not attain similarly to the proportions of a pandemic. But if it is indeed a heresy to differ about *Freedom*, then I confess to being inclined against it. In his

slyly invigorating essay on "the pleasure of hating," Hazlitt complained that "the reputation of some books is raw and *un-aided*," and noted that "the popularity of the most successful writers operates to wean us from them, by the cant and fuss that is made about them, by hearing their names everlastingly repeated, and by the number of ignorant and indiscriminate admirers they draw after them." Celebrity is not a literary value, and I do not believe in the wisdom of crowds. I think that crowds—well-read ones, too—are foolish and fickle. They are especially foolish when they regard themselves as a coterie. Their tastes need to be scrutinized with a hermeneutical hostility, because they are so easily invented and so easily manipulated. This is especially the case in a society consecrated supremely to promotion—that swoons over the pseudo-sagacity of Malcolm Gladwell, and regards people and the expressions of their souls as brands, and confuses techniques for marketing with techniques for living. The sales of *Freedom* say nothing about the qualities of *Freedom*. Has the book struck a chord? Of course. But that is anthropology, not literature; and nothing is more forgiving than anthropology.

SO A FEW WORDS should be said for the higher spleen. A negative review of a book is often not an attack, but a defense against an attack—a retaliation, or, if you will pardon the *Begriff*, a negation of a negation. The "hatchet job" is sometimes the second hatchet on the scene. A book arrives that in the opinion of the reviewer outrages a principle of politics or philosophy or history or art, and will lead its readers into error or illusion, and will coarsen discourse or experience—for such are the stakes in books, the power of books, and the real nihilism is to deny it. Why should such a book not be received combatively, if the combat is honestly joined? A shabby treatment of a consequential subject or a significant form is a corruption, and it is the mark of a reviewer's depth of conviction, and of her knowledge, to treat it as such, to fight it. An opinion about a book is an opinion

about the world. Anger at the false and the fake—as long as the labor of persuasion is done: a curse is not an act of criticism—is an admirable anger, because it is the heat of a cause, and our causes are the spurs of our culture. No culture, no literature, ever advanced by niceness. Literature is a felicity, but it is not a festival. It is a proposal, or an infinity of proposals, for an emendation, or a transformation, of consciousness. It commends ideals of seeing and ideals of feeling and ideals of thinking, and even ideals of living; and no such instructions should be exempt from strenuous and unsentimental judgment, from the foul tempers of thoughtful people, or else nothing will weigh anything and we will be only compilations of the trends of our time. Look around you: the compilations fill the streets. I do not say this maliciously. They are reading what they are told to read by this blurring world. They are acting on the guidance they get. That guidance originates in a literary and literary-critical world that is amiable, bland, clubby, pious, careerist, relentlessly cheerful, desperate for numbers, suavely relativizing, and awash in worthless praise. A universe of invitations and congratulations, of pals and candidate-pals appreciating and mythologizing each other. Books are generally assessed only internally, for what "works" and what does not "work," with synopsis usurping analysis, politely against the background of the author's literary or personal history, and almost never for the sake of a larger concept, a transcending idea, to which the review, if not the book, should owe its life. Reviews without inner necessity extol books without inner necessity. Every once in a while, when I read that a novel is the best work that a writer has "given us," I dutifully pick it up, so as to ascertain what is this gift that I have been given; and too often I put it down, discouraged and deceived, because for all the energy of its writing and the diligence of its research it seems less moving or illuminating than, say, "Eleanor Rigby." It is not the responsibility of the critic to lift the spirits of the writer or the publisher. Anyway, bad news is more stimulating than good news; and acrimony may contribute to keenness of mind. So yes, dear Jeff, business as usual: contention without end; an excess of ambition and pride in the making and taking of books; exhilaration in the quarrelsomeness about things that matter; the disturbance of the peace. Rather like your business, in fact: the seriousness trade. In the age of one hundred and forty characters, we sink or swim together.

LEON WIESELTIER



Laws, Outlaws, and Terrorists

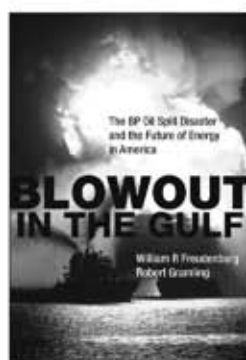
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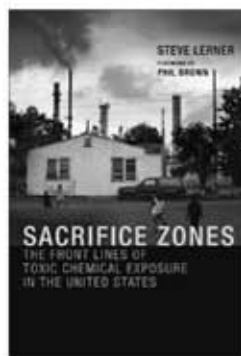


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